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ADVENTURES

FIRST
ISSUE

MAY 20c

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ROBINHOOD**

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WE ALL know who said "There's nothing new under the sun" and the quotation has been a long-standing favorite. So often has it been said that it has been accepted as fact. However, no longer can we apply the saying truthfully. For there is something new under the sun—FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, the magazine of magazines, the greatest fiction event of all time.

For one whole year the editors of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES have been preparing the magazine you now hold in your hands. Literally hundreds of the best manuscripts written by America's—no—the world's best writers of fantastic literature, have been read and re-read in a determined effort to select a new, distinctive type of fantasy, covering as broad an entertainment range as possible. For twelve long months we have conferred with writers, with the best fantastic artists, with the leading idea men in the field of unusual science fiction.

For an even longer time than that, using the experience of many long years in fantasy, careful studies have been made of the science fiction reading public, tabulating their likes and dislikes, their preferences and pet theories. And after long deliberation, the editors arrived at the following conclusions:

You asked for a large-size magazine; we have given it to you. You asked for better fantastic fiction, covering every phase of science and fantasy, of mystery and unusual adventure, of strong action and plot, of good characterization and significance; we have given you all these. You asked for *two* covers, both front and back, done by the masters of science and fantasy artists. We have done that, giving you the famous Paul on the back cover, with a new feature that will eventually provide you with the most amazing series of color paintings ever assembled. We have presented the new sensation artist of science fiction, Robert Fuqua, on the front cover. We have given you the finest interior illustrations yet created by that master of the fantastic, Julian S. Krupa.

You asked for trimmed edges. We have given them to you. You didn't ask for four-color covers, because none has dreamed that they would appear on any magazine save the highly regarded "Slacks," the quality magazines. But we have given them to you. We have raised fantastic fiction to the level of the quality magazines, and yet retained the lusty appeal of the pulp field.

We have given you the most popular of all types of features, from a comprehensive science-fantasy quiz to actual fact articles of a fantastic nature, from a friendly shoulder-to-shoulder editorial to a wide open reader department.

In short, we have incorporated something new on every page of this new magazine, in direct defiance to that now

outmoded saying, "There's nothing new under the sun."

And as a worthy big sister to AMAZING STORIES, POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY, POPULAR AVIATION, and RADIO NEWS, whose combined editorial staffs have worked to make the magazine the most sensational ever to hit the stands, we proudly present this *NEW* member of a famous family.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is *your* magazine, prepared especially for you. We know you will like it.

A READER recently questioned us regarding the reaction of rockets in space. He contended that since space is empty, the rocket gasses would have nothing to push against, and therefore, he couldn't see how the rocket would move; that it would simply remain where it was and the rocket gasses would fizz out and dissipate.

This seems to be one of the most common points that puzzles the layman, and it should really be obvious that a rocket is *impeded* by the presence of air, and *works best* in empty space.

An ocean ship uses propellers which push against the water and thus the ship moves. An airplane does the same in air. But a rocket has no propeller. Its propulsion comes from *inside* the ship. We have an open rocket tube which is filled with gas and ignited. The resultant expansion of gasses causes an "explosion." Since only one end is open, the gasses are directed out of that opening, and since this is a positive action, there is a reaction. It is a simple law of physics that every action has a reaction. We fire a gun. It kicks back—not because it is in air. It would still kick back in a vacuum. So does a rocket "kick back." It is really flying "backward," the body of the rocket moving away from the direction of the exploding gasses, by simple recoil—or kick-back.

Thus, to even the most casual thinker, it should be perfectly obvious that a rocket, both the body of it, and the gasses, would be much freer to move in a vacuum than in dense, impeding atmosphere. Have you ever stopped to think of what would happen to a rocket in water? Assuming that it would not be extinguished, it would certainly not travel as far as in air, since the enveloping medium is so much more dense. So, in empty space, where there is no enveloping medium at all, the rocket reaches its highest efficiency.

EARTH lovers like to sit and look at the moon, but we wonder if they realize how the earth would look if they were on the moon? They'd find a "moon" shining down on them which would look almost thirteen times the size of the sun! Nor would that moon ever set! On the moon, the nights are 354 to 355 hours long, or nearly fifteen days.

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Front cover by Robert Fuqua, depicting a scene in Revolt of the Robots

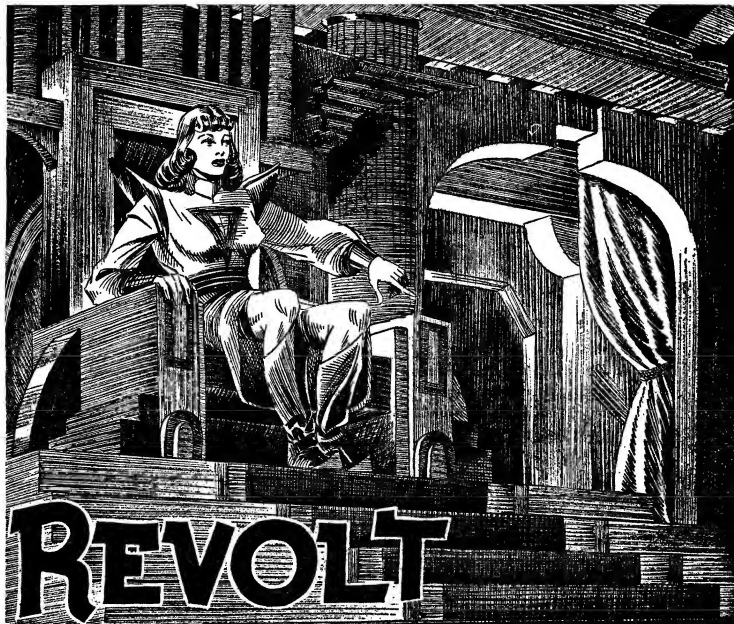
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REVOLT OF THE ROBOTS

CHAPTER I

Tarra Greghold

By **ARTHUR R. TOFTE**

DEEP within Tarra Greghold raged a fierce jealousy. The people of the year 2860 A. D. still felt the passions of primitive man, but they had learned not to show them. And Tarra, with her keen-eyed personal robot, Q9T9, watching from the corner, tried as well as she could to conceal her jealousy.

As she lay on the couch in her sun chamber, watching the three dimensional screen on the ceiling, Tarra was only an average girl of her time. The slight fuzz

Ambition gripped Tarra Greghold, and she sought to rule the world, unaware that a robot mind could become ambitious as well

of hair on the top of her head was straw-colored and gave to her a look of baldness. Her chin was small, and her thin cheeks were pinched and wan. Her slender legs and arms and almost childlike body, under

the sheer transparent covering of her gown showed scrawny and weak as she stretched wearily. Tarra Greghold was not beautiful, but by the standards of her day, neither was she especially unattractive.

Tarra was in love with young Jol Herrick, the tall slender biologist, who at that moment was giving his final lecture before his class at the School of Science. But in her jealousy she hardly listened to Herrick's words as she watched the faces of the girl students who gathered around him, watching him work. These girls, pale and thin and with fuzzy tops, were no prettier than herself, she felt, but among them must be the one Herrick was choosing instead of her.

Then, as she watched, the girl on the couch saw the young biologist, his smooth bald head glistening under the lights of the laboratory, take up a cage and hold the opening to the door of a large glass cage on the table. Out ran a white rat, and like the girls in the laboratory, Tarra too was forced to gasp with

surprise. For the rat was the largest she had ever seen in any laboratory experiment—almost twice as large as a normal rat. Then, Tarra listened while Herrick explained.

"For a month," he said in his soft high voice, "I have treated this rat with my new hormone compound, developed as you know from those new substances brought back from Venus by the Justin memorial expedition."

Herrick proudly faced the students before him.

"Think what this means," he said, "—a hormone that will increase the strength and size of animals. Who knows where this will lead!"

And as he said this, the young biologist looked at one of the girl students nearest him and smiled.

TARRA, unable to watch any longer, motioned to Q9T9 to shut off the connection. With a little bow and a slight scrape of his gears as he got into mo-



tion, the robot did as he was commanded.

"I, too, was watching," Q9T9 said in the carefully worded manner of the servant robot kind.* "If my mistress wishes a suggestion, I have one."

"Speak up," Tarra murmured wearily.

"I can see that you are unhappy, my mistress," the robot said. "Perhaps my suggestion may help you."

Tarra looked up from her couch at the four-foot high robot and smiled wanly.

"You love Dr. Herrick," the robot said bluntly, and came a step closer to the girl on the couch.

"Yes, I love Dr. Herrick," she admitted weakly. "But how can you help me?"

The robot's metallic eyes sparkled eagerly.

"For seventeen generations I have served you and your maternal ancestors. Even in that short time of 400 years I have seen many changes. One of the strangest, as you know, was the law of fixed population whereby no more births were allowed than there were deaths the previous year, and the right to have children was granted by law only to certain ones. You are jealous because Dr. Herrick has been chosen as a father in the coming year—and you are afraid that he will select one of his girl students as his mate."

"Yes, that is true," Tarra murmured softly as she turned her head away.

Q9T9 hesitated only a moment and then continued.

"Dr. Herrick has made a great discovery, but he fails to see its importance. He has shown that he has found a hormone capable of increasing the strength and size of animals. The human race is dying, dying from inaction and weakness. But humans are animals. Why can't these new hormones be used to develop a new and stronger race of humans?"

"But why should we be stronger and bigger?" Tarra asked. "We have you robots to do our work."

"Yes, we do the work," Q9T9 replied, "but unless the human race is revitalized soon, there shall one day come a time when there will be no more of you."

*Like all of mankind in this peaceful, calm age, every task was performed by robots, even questions were answered. Q9T9, Tarra's robot, had been given the most advanced mechanisms. There was hardly anything he couldn't do. The history of the world, all the great scientific truths of the ages, the knowledge of all time were recorded indelibly upon his copper brain pan. She had only to ask, and any important bit of information on anything that had ever happened was immediately forthcoming. Q9T9 had been her mother's robot, and her mother's mother's, and on back for seventeen generations.—Author.

Weak flesh dies easily. You will all be dead. And then only the robots will be left."

The girl shuddered and closed her eyes.

"Dr. Herrick does not yet realize the importance of his discovery," Q9T9 said softly, "and should you go to him, offering yourself as the first human test. . . ."

Tarra looked up at her robot with wonder.

"... When you are grown full and strong," Q9T9 continued slyly, "he will not fail to love you and choose you for his mate."

The girl on the couch moved her limbs and sat up slowly. The robot's words had stirred her as nothing in her life had done before.

"If I could be the only one to be treated. . . ." she whispered to herself.

"You can be," the robot replied. "And if you make sure that you are the only one, there is no limit to what you can do. You can do anything you wish. Anything!"

CHAPTER II

Decathlon

TARRA GREGHOLD looked at her robot servant closely, curiosity at last overcoming the jealous rage which had been poisoning his mind.

"What do you mean that if I am the only one to be treated I can do 'anything'?" she asked.

Q9T9 stared with his expressionless eyes at his mistress and replied carefully, biting off each phrase mechanically.

"In 2449," he began, "a little more than four hundred years ago, Julio Justin died. I was over a hundred years old at that time. You know, of course, that he was the last of the great dictators. With tremendous power and energy he came to be emperor of the world. Under him there were no nations, no different peoples. Under him was one nation, one people. He was the last vestige of barbaric man."

"But even in his time," Q9T9 went on, "men were weak. It was Justin's sorrow and regret that he had no son to whom to leave the world empire he had founded, for with his strong rule all wars were banished and peace was everywhere. He wanted to carry on his hope of building up the vitality of the human race. At his death he left a will. In his will he established a world-committee to rule his empire from this world-city of Shago—on one condition and with one possible exception."

"And what was that?" Tarra asked.



Jol Herrick, inventor
of the Hormone of
Rejuvenation.

"Justin said in his will, that if anyone could ever achieve the physical ability to break the decathlon records established in the barbaric Olympics of the 20th century, that person could inherit his kingdom and the rule of the world."

Tarra stared at her robot. "And you think. . . ." she whispered huskily.

"Yes," the robot replied. "If you go to Dr. Herrick and offer yourself as the first human test, you may one day rule the world."

Tarra leaned back on the couch and laughed softly to herself. And as she laughed, plans formed in her head. Jealousy and love hunger filled her with a keen desire for a chance to show Jol Herrick that she was a woman to be respected . . . and loved.

"I shall go to him at once," she said, and motioned to Q9T9 to help her rise from the couch. There was a smile on the girl's face as she leaned on the robot and went with him out through a doorway to a little balcony overlooking the great world-city of Shago. She allowed her servant to fasten her securely in her private transport car and then she touched a button that sent the little car hurtling through the maze of sky traffic along a directional beam that was clear and unobstructed.

IN the three minute journey to Herrick's laboratory, Tarra saw nothing of the great domed glass sky overhead, built by Julio Justin's genius 400 years before, nor of the tall orderly rows of glass cylinders, five hundred feet high, in which people lived, nor the flashing of cars hurtling past her on other directional beams. Tarra's thoughts were all of the young biologist whom she loved.

After her car had come to rest on the narrow landing terrace jutting out from his laboratory on the 34th floor, she allowed Herrick's robot servant, V6X3, to escort her in to the laboratory.

"Tarra," the young scientist cried with surprise, "it is good to see you again. You are not angry with me any more, are you?"

The girl touched her lips to the young man's smooth cheek and smiled.

"No, I am not angry now. I've come to offer amends. I heard your lecture this afternoon and I want to be the first to try your hormones."

"But a girl!" he exclaimed. "I should experiment longer before I try it on a human being."

"Think how it would bring fame to you," she urged. "And think what it would do for the human race. You would be the most famous man in the world."

"If I try it on a human, it should be on a man, not a woman," he declared.

"It would bring me fame, too," Tarra replied softly, coming closer to him and touching his soft hairless face with her hand. "For my sake, will you?"

Jol Herrick laughed a quick nervous laugh as he dismissed his fears. "All right," he agreed. "We will start the treatments tomorrow. In three or four weeks we should know the results."

"In three or four weeks we will be famous," the girl declared. Then she called from the doorway, "I'll be back in the morning."

A FEW minutes later she was in her own sun chamber, Q9T9 removing the robe from her shoulders.

"I saw and heard all," the robot said.

"Yes, and tomorrow I begin the treatments," Tarra cried as she slipped wearily down on the couch.

And in the days and weeks that followed, during the process of being treated, Tarra Greghold began to fill out, to acquire a new voluptuous roundness in her body. Her eyes sparkled with new life. Her hair grew long and heavy and fell in a blond cascade around her broadening shoulders, supple with new, firm strength.

But Jol Herrick, in his eagerness to chart the changes in the girl, failed utterly to perceive the growing beauty of the girl. Tarra noted this with chagrin, but managed to conceal her feelings. The time would soon come, she felt, when he would be only too willing to come to her.

The thought of her ultimate triumph when he should finally realize how much superior she was to her sisters, and when his emotions would be awakened, as they must be, gave her great anticipatory pleasure. In fact, as the days passed, she found herself experiencing the gamut of human emotions as she never had felt them—so intense, so strong, so vibrant.

And her brain worked amazingly well—so that she planned for long hours, of the future.

And as the days went by, something strange and fierce seized hold of her, a driving force that ate at her mind like some atavistic hunger. With the growing strength of her body, there came also a craving for



Tarra Greghold, a superwoman among weeklings.

power. It was like one of Herrick's huge rats gnawing at her vitals. She couldn't stop now.

One day, in Herrick's laboratory, she stood watching his slender body now so much weaker than her own. A smile of pleasure was on her lips.

"The treatments, you say, are over?" she asked softly.

Herrick looked up and smiled wearily. The strain of the past month had drained from him most of his normal strength and vitality.

"Yes, they are over," he replied as he looked proudly at her tensed body, now so round and full in the clinging gown she wore. "They are over . . . and a complete success. Perhaps now we can begin to restore all mankind to full vitality and strength, as soon as another expedition can be sent to Venus for more of this hormone compound."

"And in the meantime?" Tarra asked.

"Oh, I have enough of my compound in this refrigerator to take care of half a hundred persons."

"Half a hundred," Tarra smiled wryly. "But how will you convince the World Committee that your hormone is a success? Not by treating a half hundred?"

"No," Herrick nodded. "I think you are proof enough. When I show them how much superior you are to all other humans, they must believe."

Tarra laughed. Back in her sun chamber Q9T9 would be watching her and listening to her at this moment. Now was the time for her to strike her first blow.

"I have been hoping you would say that," she said. "I have been preparing for it. For weeks I have been training myself to do various athletic feats. Have you ever heard of the ancient Olympics of the barbaric 20th century? They had a series of events they called the decathlon, to discover which was the best all 'round athlete—running, jumping, throwing. The records set in 1964 have never been beaten. In the 21st century, as you probably know, the Olympics were dropped. Now, I believe I can break the Decathlon record set in 1964!"

Jol Herrick looked at the girl with surprise and nodded.

"It would be dramatic," he said with a start. "The World Committee would have to believe then."

"Why not call a meeting of the Committee for tomorrow afternoon?" Tarra suggested. "Hold it in the great central park in the city. I shall be there at fifteen o'clock."

And as Jol Herrick opened the door of his laboratory for the girl to leave, his hand was trembling and his pale blue eyes were glistening with moisture.

"Tomorrow will be the greatest day of my life," he said.

And a few minutes later, when Tarra had returned to her apartment and was greeted by her robot slave, she too threw back her head and said, "Tomorrow will be the greatest day of my life."

And then she looked at the little being before her and added, "tonight you will go to Jol Herrick's laboratory and destroy all the hormone compound which he has there. I want no rival."

Q9T9's cold metallic eyes sparked with electric intensity. "My mistress," he said, "is proving that she is worthy of being ruler of the world."

CHAPTER III

Ruler of the World

TARRA GREGHOLD sat quietly in her transport car with her robot slave as she watched with amusement the arrival of the World Committee at the meeting place in the great park. Old and feeble, most of them were. They arrived singly, each with his private robot supporting his tottering form. They were thin and weak with deep sunken eyes and owl-like faces, and hairless, shiny pates.

Tarra, from the shelter of her car, watched Jol Herrick talk to the forty or more members of the assembled Committee. She saw him display one of his huge white rats. She saw him talk earnestly and fervidly as old Dr. Netherstone, head of the Committee, shook a bony finger under the young man's nose as though challenging him to prove what he had said.

Then she saw Herrick turn in her direction and motion to her to come forth from her private car.

Tarra stepped into view, and heard the cry of amazement that went up from the members of the Committee. She smiled to herself as she realized what a sensation she must be to their pale eyes—like a woman out of some ancient history book, an Amazon direct from the war-filled 20th century or the even more primitive periods. And as she walked straight toward old Dr. Netherstone with mighty strides, she saw the old philosopher blink and shake his head with wonder.

"My name is Tarra Greghold," she said to the Committee in a strong, clear, vibrant voice. "I propose to prove to you that I am as strong as Dr. Herrick has just now told you. My robot has in his right hand a timepiece such as the ancients used, with the same time intervals that they used. Distances have been marked off in the park here, as you note. I now further propose to attempt to break the decathlon records set in the Olympics of 1964."

Tarra quietly waited, the smile still on her face, as Jol Herrick quickly explained to the members of the Committee what the Olympics were and what the Decathlon events consisted of.

Then the girl nodded to her robot, and began one by one, to go through the events of the ancient Decathlon, running faster, jumping better, and throwing farther than any human had ever done before. At the conclusion of the extraordinary performance, the members of the Committee feebly gathered around her, croaking their hoarse congratulations. Only Dr. Netherstone shook his head in doubt.

TARRA allowed Q9T9 to drape a robe around her bare shoulders. Then she took a paper from her robot and held it out to the tall, angular head of the Committee.

"Doctor," she said quietly, "this paper is a copy of Julio Justin's will written in 2449, just before he died and left the world-empire to the Committee. Surely you know of it?"

Dr. Netherstone lifted his eyes to the girl who towered over him and at Jol Herrick who stood beside her, and a look of sudden fear swept across his thin face.

"What does this mean?" the old philosopher asked.

"It means that I have just carried out the terms of Julio Justin's will—and I hereby claim the rulership of the world. For over four hundred years you have ruled by this will. I now dissolve the World Committee—for always. Gentlemen, I am your new ruler by Julio Justin's own will!"

Tarra looked with continued amusement at the confusion her words had caused among the feeble members of the group. She saw with pleasure Herrick's complete bewilderment. And Dr. Netherstone was squinting up at her as though he thought her mad. Here was something, she knew, that these weak old men were unable to answer. She knew that in this orderly world where everything went by rote and right that her legal claim was answerable. She had fulfilled the obligations of Justin's will and centuries of idle life and easy ways had made the entire human race an easy prey to her physical superiority and stronger will.

Tarra Greghold laughed an arrogant, disdainful laugh. Then she turned to Q9T9 and said, "Take me to the World Conference Hall. That will be my temporary palace until I can have a new one built."

In the days that followed, the strong hand of Tarra Greghold became all important through the huge world city of Shago which she now dominated. Robots and humans alike were mobilized to do her bidding. Although no new building work had been done for over four hundred years, Tarra ordered that a new palace be built for her on the grounds of the great central park in the middle of the city—a palace such as even Julio Justin had never imagined.

It was not to be circular as were all the other structures in the city, but cone-shaped with the top pinnacle to be her living quarters. And the glass to be used was not the semi-transparent material of the other buildings, but an opaque glass that admitted light and ultra violet rays of the sun and that allowed her to look out without being seen—a glass whose use had been known as early as the 20th century.

DURING the first month, the various men and women who were ordered to the task of working on the new palace fell in their tracks. Some of them died of burst hearts, utterly incapable of the sustained physical effort which Tarra was now demanding of them.

And Tarra, the new lust for power seizing her, or-

dered that all robots be put under her will. She commanded that each person who did not want to work on the palace to come to her and voluntarily give up his private robot, turning over to Tarra the will control that held the robot in bondage.

Soon the girl was in control of the entire robot population of the great world city—nearly ten million. Ten million robots marched to her command. In the meantime, tens of thousands of humans died from inability to take care of themselves. But the palace work went on. Robots worked by day and by night, ceaselessly raising the palace, level upon level.

And then, one evening shortly after it was finished, Tarra stood upon the topmost point of her towering palace and looked out over the strangely motionless city below her. Q9T9 stood beside her.

"These humans of yours are weak things," Q9T9's voice box clicked. "The city is too good for them."

Tarra looked down at her little metal slave and nodded.

"Exactly," she agreed, "the city is too good for these puny humans. They die like flies when they have to work."

"Why not outcast them to the great dry plains outside the city's dome and let them find their own shelter?" the robot suggested eagerly, his eyes sparkling.

"The city is of no use empty," Tarra replied.

"There are ten million robots in the city. They would give your city life and energy."

"Life and energy!" Tarra repeated as she looked up through the transparent dome overhead at the night sky. "That is what I admire. I could be ruler of a kingdom of deathless robots. I could achieve anything then—anything!"

"And there would be death to all humans?" Q9T9 asked slyly.

"There would be death to all humans," Tarra replied. Then she paused as a new thought struck her. "But when I died, who would lead the robots?"

Q9T9 replied with care. "Before you died, you could command all robots to obey me, releasing your will control to me. Then I would be ruler until the rust of eternity struck at our vitals."

Tarra Greghold looked down at her robot slave suspiciously. "I'll allow no ambitions, mechanical one. Until my normal life has ended."

Then she sighed as she looked out over the vast city, thinking of puny, weak Jol Herrick for whom she had made all this effort, "If only there were a man worthy of me in the whole world . . . perhaps then there could be a race of humans worthy of inheriting this empire and carrying on my work."

But, as she spoke, Q9T9's eyes sparked maliciously.

CHAPTER IV

The Bearded Stranger

IN the terrible days that followed when Tarra Greghold's 20th century barbaric ruthlessness was at its

height, she called meetings of thousands of humans at a time and had them run through violent exercises. Those that dropped from burst blood vessels and ruptured hearts were hauled away by robots and dumped into incinerators. The survivors dragged themselves wearily back to their couches.

Tarra knew that the people feared her and hated her, but with the new power and strength in her own limbs came also a cruel lust for torture. As her body had returned to the primitive state of the 20th century, so had her mind reverted to the original passions of that mad, sentient period. The men—weak, hairless, irresolute, bending to her will—aroused in her only the utmost disdain.

Then one day it happened—

Word came to her that a man had been seized far to the west of the city by a wandering group of her robots searching through the ancient ruins of a semi-barbaric city of the 21st century. But the strange thing was that the man was taller than other men, bigger of frame, stronger, and he had long black hair on his head, and he was dressed in tattered rags.

When Tarra Greghold heard this news from Q9T9, she tried to hide from him the sudden leap of her pounding heart, the glow of eagerness that flushed her cheeks. Something inside her seemed to tell that at last he was come—the man she had been yearning for, the man who would be a fit mate for her. She ordered him brought to her at once.

A few hours later, Tarra stood in her central chamber in the apex of her conical palace, with Q9T9 at her side, the two of them staring at the great gold elevator doors that were slowly opening. Through the doors came a small file of robots, bringing with them in chains such a man as Tarra had never seen before.

He was taller by half a head than she. His black hair reached almost to his shoulders. Fierce, dark eyes stared back at her insolently. And Tarra could see between the tatters of his clothes the bulging muscles of his arms and thighs, supple and smooth with youth. This man, she knew, was the man she wanted for her mate! Tarra smiled. It was the first real smile that had softened her face since she had taken Jol Herrick's hormones. And as she smiled, she motioned to the muscular one to come closer. Then she ordered the robots from the room.

"What is your name?" she asked. "And where do you come from?"

For a long moment, the huge man stood silently gazing back into her eyes.

"Call me Jork," he replied in a deep, rumbling voice. Then he looked at her full, rounded figure. "And I come from the same place you do."

"But that is impossible," Tarra replied. "I have never heard of a man like you. I know there are no more like me. I am the strongest person in the world."

Jork looked at her. "Except for me," he said coldly.

Tarra's eyes narrowed and a quickening flush came to her cheeks. Slowly her fists clenched and un-

clenched. The force of Herrick's hormones had given her tremendous powers of courage and love of combat. And here before her stood, for the first time since she had become a giantess among humans, another being worthy of battle with her. Intuitively she felt that she had to test his strength, to see if he really were fit to be her mate and to help her start a new race of super-humans.

"I am Tarra, ruler of the world—because I am the strongest," she cried with passion as she hit the chained man across the face with the back of her hand.

JORK never blinked an eye nor moved a muscle. Instead he continued to glare back insolently at her.

Suddenly the girl leaned toward him, her whole manner softened. She caressed his hair with loving and tender fingers.

"You have beautiful long hair," she said softly. "You and I were meant for each other. The rest of humanity is not worth saving, but you and I—we have a duty and a destiny. I am ruler of all this great world city. You shall be my consort prince. You shall help me rule a kingdom of robots."

The man stirred restlessly under her caresses.

"And what if I refuse?" he asked disdainfully.

Tarra stepped back away from him and shook her head. "You wouldn't dare. I am ruler of Shago and nothing can keep me from what I want. And I want you."

"And if I accept," the brawny one's voice rumbled.

Tarra smiled. "We shall be the only human beings in a world of robots. Ten million of them, there are, to do our bidding. There is nothing we can't have, nothing we won't be able to do.

"First we shall kill off all human beings—they are of no use. Then we shall set out to do all the things the human race has never been able to do. Perhaps we can set up regular communication with Venus. Not just one trip like the Justin Memorial Expedition—but a regular service. Perhaps we can wage war—real war—with the Venusians and bring them under our control. They are probably more worthy of living than our earthly humans. We might re-colonize earth with them, flesh and blood slaves to wait on us and our robots. We shall build more and greater cities like Shago and make use of all those waste lands which history tells us once were fertile and teeming with people.

"Some day," she continued, "I shall be empress of a greater world than has ever been, and you will be my first assistant."

Jork grinned with sardonic disdain.

"I too, know something of history," he said. "And if I remember correctly, the barbaric 20th century was full of men—dictators they called them—who were as mad as you. They thought they could kill and pillage and dominate their world as you now want to dominate yours. But history also tells us that they

had their short day, and it was soon over and that even Julio Justin was but a brief throwback to that day. And now you come, you with your return of the barbaric lust—and all because of Herrick's hormones!"

Tarra recoiled with surprise. "What do you know about Herrick's hormones?" she cried.

"What do I know about them?" Jork replied bitterly. "I know everything about them, for I am Jol Herrick!"

CHAPTER V

The Robot Army

"YOU—Jol Herrick!" Tarra cried in amazement. "But I had all your compound destroyed. You can't be Herrick."

The huge man squared his broad muscular shoulders.

"Yes, you destroyed all my compound as I found when I returned from that test in the park. But you forgot the rats that I treated. I made new compound from those rats. Then I went away from the city. I treated myself. I wanted to find a way to destroy you. Then your robots found and brought me here."

The man lifted the heavy gold chains that held his arms together.

"These may hold me now," he said coldly, "but some day I shall destroy you."

Tarra sank back on a couch. Everything that she had hoped and yearned for was slipping away from her. Then she sprang to her feet and rang for her robot slave.

"I'll make you surrender to me," she said fiercely. "I'll have you beaten and tortured until you are ready to come to me on your hands and knees."

The doors of the golden elevator clicked behind her, and she turned to see Q9T9 looking at them with a sly glint in his eyes.

"You rang for me?" the robot asked.

Tarra nodded toward Herrick. "Have you known all along who he is?"

Q9T9 bowed slightly. "Yes, my mistress. I thought it would give you pleasure to find out for yourself. I am only four hundred years old, you know, and I am not accustomed to your present 20th century mental and physical condition."

Tarra looked from her robot to Herrick.

"Take him," she commanded, "to the torture room on the 77th floor. I'll show him a few samples of the ancient forms of torture."

A few minutes later, Q9T9 was back, bending with his mechanical bow to her.

"Your man," he clicked out the words, "is fastened to the rack of the ancient Inquisition. He awaits your pleasure."

"You have done well," Tarra said distractedly. Then she turned and looked at her robot closely.

"Once you made a suggestion, mechanical one, that brought me to the rule of the world. Perhaps you have

a suggestion now that could win this man to me."

Q9T9 stood motionless, his glass lens eyes staring straight before him.

"Yes, I have a suggestion, my mistress," he replied. "What is it?"

Q9T9 stiffened slightly as though there were an actual physical flesh and blood surge in him to increase his stature. Then he replied—

"As ruler of the world you can never win this man. No man's love can be won on the torture rack. It is as a woman that you must win him. For as he is the only man in the world fit to be your mate, so you are the only woman in the world worthy of him. Go to him as a woman, offering him your love and an equal share in your rule."

"BUT I can't do that. I am the ruler—I shall never give that up!"

"Of course not," Q9T9 insisted. "But you can appear to. Give me temporary rule over the will-controls of the robots. You can then go to him, not as world ruler but as a woman. In the meantime I will wait for you to return. The plan is the only one that will succeed."

Tarra Greghold shook her head doubtfully. But she walked over to the instrument-panel on the gold desk, touched a button that tuned her in to every one of the ten million robots in the world city.

"Hear me, robots of Shago," she said. "Until I return you will take your orders from Q9T9. Your will-controls for that time will be under his command."

Then Tarra walked over to the gold elevator. But before she entered the cage, she faced her robot slave again.

"And just to make certain that you do not play me false, ambitious one, I retain my will-control over you and I order you not to leave this room until I return."

The girl stepped back into the elevator. It was not until the doors were closing behind her that she saw Q9T9 hurrying to the gold desk to touch the button that would put him in contact with the ten million robots. A moment of suspicion seized her, but the doors closed and she dropped in an instant to the 77th floor, doubt and fear momentarily forgotten.

As she left the elevator and walked past the guard of robots who stood outside the double-thick doors of the ancient torture room, she noticed their rapt attention as though they were listening to a message.

She motioned to one of the robots to open the doors for her. He didn't move—an unthinkable failure to obey! With a gasp of exasperation, Tarra seized the door handles and drew it open. Then as she stepped into the torture room, she turned and looked at the group of robots.

They were marching stiffly toward her.

"STOP where you are," she cried.

The robots marched closer. Something was wrong. Then she realized that she no longer had hold over their will-controls. Could Q9T9 really have played her false?

The thought struck her like a blow, sending her reeling back into the room. Quickly she bolted the doors on the inside. Had all this scheme merely been a plan of her own robot's to gain control over her?

In her bewildered mind, the pieces of the puzzle began to fit together—Q9T9's first suggestion about world power, his advice to kill off all humans, his idea of releasing the will-controls of ten million robots to him. It was all clear to her now.

Not seeing the man stretched grotesquely on the torture rack, Tarra ran to the side of the room and looked out through the glass walls at the scene far below. Thousands and tens of thousands of robots were marching steadily toward the conical tower. From all directions they came, marching in that queer strained, not quite stiff way of theirs. And on they came, crowding on each other's heels, millions of them, coming at the bidding and command of her own robot slave, Q9T9.

For the first time she noticed the man on the rack. She went over and released his bonds.

When he had rubbed his arms and legs and restored their circulation, Tarra took him over to look down on the sight in the area around the conical tower. Millions of robots were now there, milling around, waiting for further command from Q9T9.

She pointed down. "And like a fool, I gave control of the robot army to my personal robot, Q9T9. He has used me to get the rule of the world himself. You've got to help me get out of this."

The huge man beside her smiled wryly. "A while ago you spoke of torturing me. Now you beg my help. Why should I help?"

Tarra drew herself to her full height and looked Herrick full in the eyes. But before she could speak, he seized her by the shoulders and held her firmly at arm's length from him.

"When you were in the saddle," he said to her, his lips narrowing into a fine line, "it was all right for you to kill off thousands of poor, weak human beings. That satisfied your hunger for power and your appetite for cruelty. But now, when your own life is in danger, you beg me to help you, to save you."

"Listen closely," he rumbled from deep in his beard, "I've waited for this moment ever since that day in the park when you broke old Doctor Netherstone's heart. You got yourself into this mess—now get yourself out of it!"

CHAPTER VI

The Crusaders' Battle Axe

TARRA said not a word as she recoiled back from the vehemence of the young scientist's accusation. Further and further she shrank back into herself. All the months of rule and power began to dissolve into a mist as though it had never happened. All the urging in her body for ruthless rule lost itself in a realization that she was in love with this strange, powerful,

man who had the peaceful eyes of Jol Herrick but the voice and body of a Viking god. This man suddenly became more important to her than anything she had ever known before, more important even than the death that waited for her outside the door.

Without realizing quite what she was doing, she threw her arms around Herrick's neck and pressed her lips to his.

"If you won't help me to live," she cried, "then help me to die."

Herrick pushed her away from him with violence.

The girl threw herself at his feet. "This room is filled with instruments of torture weapons of death and of warfare out of the ancient days," Tarra sobbed. "Choose any of them and kill me. That is all I deserve."

Herrick stepped back away from her just as a heavy thud sounded at the great golden doors. He looked at the doors and then around at the haphazard collection of ancient relics that filled the room.

Disregarding the girl completely, he walked around picking up a device here and there. A huge battle axe dating from the 13th century crusade made his eyes light with pleasure as he swung it in a half arc about his head. Another queer metal object drew his attention. He held it awkwardly in his hands, examining it carefully. Touching a certain spot, he was startled when the device roared into action and he saw a row of neat round holes appear in the wood rack across the room. He looked at it closer.

He picked up another object. Aiming it away from himself, he touched a series of knobs and levers and suddenly an electric flame shot forth. This, too, he knew was a weapon of ancient times.

Tarra, from her place on the floor, watched the man go from object to object. Finally he turned and came toward her.

"What chance have we if they break down the doors?" he asked her.

Tarra shook her head. "Our only hope is to get back up to the tower room where Q9T9 is. When I gave him power over the will-controls of the robots, I retained my power over his will-control and I forbade him from leaving that room. As long as he can keep me from him, he is master of the robots. If we can win our way to him, I can get back the will-controls over the robots."

HERRICK looked at her and smiled. "For the first time in my life I face a fight. And I find I like the idea. If I must die, I want to die fighting. And with these strange weapons . . . perhaps we may win."

At that instant, the girl screamed as the gold doors crashed in and robots tumbled into the room.

"Stay close behind me," Herrick ordered, and he swung around to face the oncoming robots.

With a roar of joy, he pressed the trigger on the machine gun and sent a whiplash of bullets that cut down the front ranks of the mechanical beings. It

was chaos at once—with those that were shot down still trying to advance although their lower propelling mechanisms had failed. It was like legless men trying to walk. And behind them pushed hordes more of robots, blindly advancing on the couple in the room.

But soon the sheer weight of the metal robots themselves, pushing forward on the front immobile ranks, began to crush those in front and in the middle. There was a steady crunch of breaking metal as the mechanical beings kept pushing forward hopelessly against those in front, even before the machine gun was empty and had to be thrown aside.

Tarra smiled up at Herrick as he turned to look at her. "Rather horrible, isn't it?" she said.

Herrick looked across the mass of metal robots, and the girl could see him grinning to himself.

"If we get up on top of that table over there," he said to her, "we can jump over on to the bodies of the robots and walk on top of them as far as the elevators. The central cage is empty, I can see."

Tarra and Herrick leaped lightly to the table top. But before climbing out over the sea of robots that stretched before them to the doors, Herrick picked up the battle axe and the electric flame thrower. With these under his arm, he helped Tarra in jumping from one robot head to the next, like crossing a brook on small stones.

Once in the gold elevator, the two breathed easier. Up they shot to the apex of Tarra's conical palace.

"If I can but come face to face with Q9T9, he will have to obey me," Tarra stated. "He is under my will-control the moment I face him."

As the elevator stopped and the doors slid quietly open, Herrick stood firm, his flame thrower ready.

Tarra screamed as a score of robots came rushing into the small cage, giving the two no chance to get out into the room beyond. With the fighting instinct of a cornered animal, Herrick let loose the jet of flame from the flame throwing machine.

There was a sudden flash and the robot directly in front of Herrick sank to his knees and fell forward. As his head slipped by Herrick, the metal seared a path across his arm—the robot's head was red hot!

Again the flame roared forth with the force of a bolt of lightning, and again, and again. And each time, a robot fell, his metal mechanisms fused together in the terrific heat of the electric flame.

Then, suddenly, the flame throwing machine was dead . . . useless. And in that same instant, before the rest of the robots could corner them in the cage, the two leaped out into the room.

TARRA shrank back behind Herrick as she saw the remaining half dozen robots advancing on them—coldly, unemotionally, ruthlessly, obeying a command they had no capacity to disobey.

She saw Herrick hunch his powerful shoulders in eagerness. Then she watched as he leaped forward, the great huge battle axe swinging in a vast circle over

his head. And she heard his cry of joy as the axe crunched deep into the metal brain pan of the first robot.

From behind him, she watched the fierce battle that ensued. Once the robots had Herrick almost surrounded and were coming at him from all sides. But the next instant he swung the axe low, like some ancient Crusader cutting a swathe through the lines of the Saracens. With the last swing of the great two bladed axe, Herrick brought down one of the two remaining robots, but the ancient shaft broke in his hands.

The last robot came unswerving toward Herrick and the huge man spread his legs apart to meet the rush of the other. With his bare hands, he seized the robot and bent it over. The muscles on his back and arms stood out as he struggled with the metal being, but gradually inch by inch, the robot began to bend, the metal plates cracking under the terrific strain. When Herrick stood erect, he turned and faced Tarra, blood flowing from a dozen or more wounds. A smile was on his lips.

"I never knew what joy it is to fight," he said.

Then the two humans, remembering what they had come for, stepped around the elevator shaft and approached the gold desk at which Q9T9 was standing.

"Order the robots to halt where they are," commanded Tarra, facing the robot.

Stiffly Q9T9 bowed and gave the order. The dull thunder of moving robots below ceased and all became quiet.

"Now disconnect your metal brain," Tarra went on relentlessly.

The robot's hands moved to obey.

"No!" snapped Herrick suddenly. "Tell him to stop."

With a question in her eyes Tarra obeyed, turning to Herrick in puzzlement. He met her gaze levelly.

"Tell him to give me absolute control of the robots," he demanded.

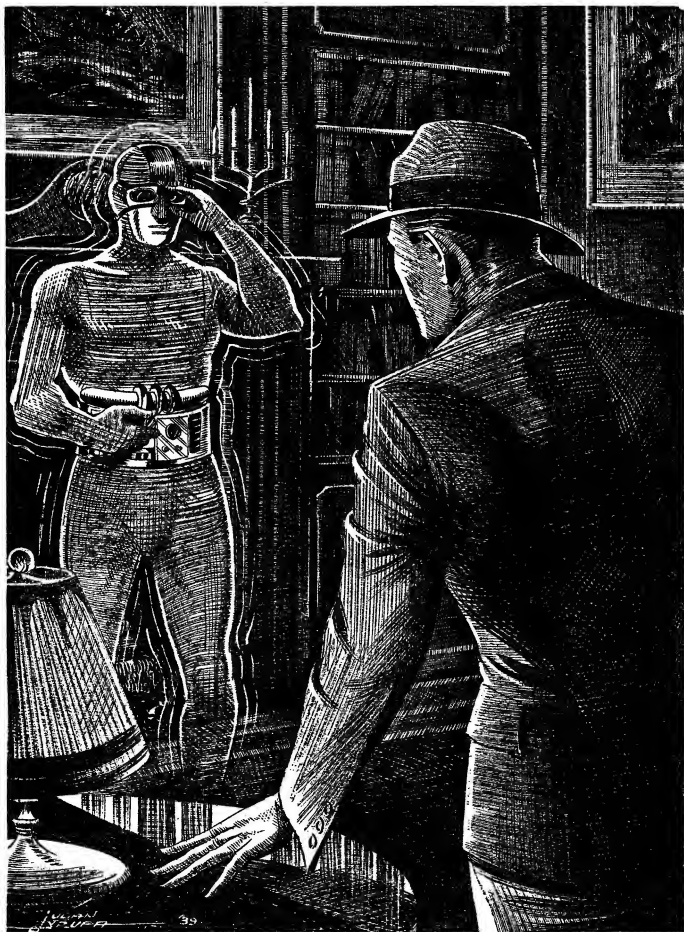
For an instant Tarra stared, then obediently she gave the command. "I am yours to rule as you will," she murmured softly, "and to prove it I surrender also the will-control of Q9T9."

With a gleaming exultance in his eyes, Herrick snatched her to him and planted a kiss on her lips. Then he strode to the instrument panel, threw the switch and spoke with firm decision.

"Robots of Shago, *all of you*, disconnect your brain controls!"

Beside him, Q9T9's metallic arms obeyed, in company with every other robot in Shago. As the last wire was severed, his metal body crashed to the floor, a limp heap of cold metal. From the floors below, and from the street outside, came a great crash of collapsing metal bodies, then silence; silence that was not disturbed.

"The new Adam and Eve will need no robots," said Herrick masterfully as he took Tarra into his arms.



Before Ted Marne's startled eyes a strange metal-clad figure materialized

The INVISIBLE ROBINHOOD

CHAPTER I

Out of Thin Air

BY EANDO BINDER

THE young couple strolled down the deserted midnight street. The party had been fun and they were still laughing. They had decided to walk a ways, in the cool night air, before taking a subway. They were too absorbed in their conversation to think of danger as they passed the black patch of an unlighted gangway.

"Stick 'em up!" came the command.

Something hard jabbed in the young man's back. The girl started to give a shriek, but was silenced by the harsh voice of the bandit who had loomed out of the shadows.

"Take it easy, sister. You don't want your boyfriend shot, do ya? Hand over your stuff. No fuss, now—"

After a hopeless glance up and down the street, the young man gave up his wallet, watch and gold stickpin. The girl was forced to give her pocketbook, earrings and silver bracelets. She fumbled nervously. Impatiently, the gunman clutched at the locket around her neck.

"Oh, not that!" gasped the girl. "I've had it all my life—please—"

"Shut up!" growled the bandit. "I take what I want. I'll have that locket, too—"

"I don't think you will!" said another voice. The gunman whirled, tensely, ready to shoot. He saw nothing to shoot at. But something like a steel hand grasped his wrist and twisted it sharply. He dropped his gun with a cry of agony.

"Rat! Preying on people like a vulture—" said the ghostly voice again, from empty air.

Something like an iron fist cracked against the bandit's jaw, snapping his head back. The gunman tried to run away, but an unseen fist struck him in whichever direction he tried. Again and again blows landed till the robber dropped unconscious, with blood streaming from his battered face.

The young couple, arms tightly entwined, had watched with paralyzed amazement. Now they saw an invisible something retrieve their stolen articles from the prone man's pockets. The articles formed

Unseen, relentless, the Invisible Robinhood stalked crime rings and war lords. Ted Marne and Leda Norris knew his name but neither knew the awful secret he bore

themselves into a little heap on the sidewalk.

"There you are!" spoke the disembodied voice. Then they heard soft footfalls retreating down the street. But they saw only the bare sidewalk!

UP in a small office perched like an eyrie on the 44th floor of the office building, "Doc" Hobson rubbed his hands gleefully. He opened the last envelope, took out the dollar bill enclosed, and tossed the coupon on the floor with hundreds of others.

The discarded coupon read—"Please send me the 56-page booklet on How To Grow New Luxuriant Hair, even though completely bald, with the scalp-massage method, by Dr. Fred Hobson, world-famous authority on this method. I enclose herewith a dollar bill. My name is—"

There were spaces then for name and address, with a heavy-print note at the bottom stating a money-back-in-five-days guarantee, if not satisfactory.

"The laugh is, we don't even send 'em a booklet!" chortled Hobson, raising his hand to pat his own bald head. "I'd like to use the method myself—if I knew it! Now come on, Kirby, and help me pack these bills together in bundles of a hundred."

"A pleasure, doctor!" grunted Jack Kirby, his partner in their bold swindle. They laid dollar bills carefully on top of one another and pasted strips of paper around bundles of a hundred.

"Eleven hundred and fifty-eight today," declared Doc Hobson when they were done. He locked the door carefully and then opened their safe. They took out the other packets of dollar bills therein and heaped them on the desk.

"Ten grand in ten days!" summarized Hobson.

"We'll take these to the bank now, have them changed to big bills, and skip the city. The Federal agents will be on our trail any day now, for defraud through the mails. Ten grand—not a bad haul!"

Kirby laughed, tossing a pack in the air and catching it. "And all it cost us was two week's rent here, and a couple hundred in advertising. That's what I call profit!"

"What do you say we take a run down to Palm Beach and blow ourselves to a good time—on other people's hard-earned dough?" suggested Doc Hobson.

"Good idea!" exclaimed Kirby, tossing the packet in the air again.

But this time he did not catch it. The packet mysteriously stopped in mid-air and then seemed to float toward the window.

"What the hell!" gasped Kirby, passing a hand in front of his eyes.

Hobson stared, paralyzed at the phenomenon.

At the open window, the strip binding of the packet ripped open and the dollar bills flung themselves out into the wind. Fluttering and twisting, they fell toward the ground, like a shower of green rain.

"The wind is blowing just right," said a voice from in front of the two frozen men. "The money will drift into the tenement district a few blocks away. The people there can use the money more than you two—gentlemen!"

The disembodied voice went on calmly, as Hobson finally made a move.

"Put down that gun, Hobson—excuse me—Dr. Hobson! I have you covered. Besides, you don't know what to shoot at or where."

Another packet rose off the desk, floated to the window and was there dispersed out into the open air.

"Don't try to stop me," said the voice. "I'd just as soon shoot you as not. Jack, be a good boy and hand me the packets. Hobson, you help too. In fact you, Hobson—you scatter these bills, as I showed you how."

The men had to obey, under threat of bullets that might snuff out their cowardly lives. Hobson stood at the window, and as Kirby handed him the packets, he broke the bands and flung the money out.

"Isn't it fun?" said the unseen voice sweetly. "Look how pretty those bills twinkle as they drift down!"

But Hobson and his partner did not see anything pretty in the sight. They were sick. It wasn't so much the loss of the ten thousand dollars they had so cleverly swindled. It was the thought of their utter helplessness against this invisible presence that struck cold terror in their dazed minds.

WOODROW JONES stepped forward before the loudspeaker microphone. Adopting the look of a patriarch about to address his flock, he raised his arms. The crowd fell silent, in the rally hall.

"My worthy friends," he began in his sonorous voice. "I am not here to make an empty speech full

of double-edged promises. I'm going to get right down to brass tacks. Our platform guarantees five things. First is the matter of schools, for your children and mine. We'll build new schools, modern, splendid, worthwhile—"

"But very expensive to the taxpayers!" interrupted a soft voice directly in Woodrow Jones' right ear.

The politician had choked on his last word, startled. He looked around to see who had spoken, but there was no one nearer than those seated on the platform, twenty feet back of him. What was the matter with him, thinking he was hearing things?

He turned back to the crowd, excused himself for the pause and went on. "Secondly, I have fool-proof plans for reducing taxes, in six months, to two-thirds of their present rate. And—"

"Of course," said the mocking voice in his ear, "after that the taxes will strangely rise higher—and higher—"

This time Woodrow Jones was definitely taken aback. He had heard the voice as plainly as if someone stood at his very side. Yet the limelight stage was barren of a soul. Jones' men in back of him looked at him blankly, wondering why he stared around so queerly. They had obviously heard nothing.

Jones' amplified voice went on, but it was a little unsure now. He got through the taxation matter and launched into item three on his election platform.

"Extensive park improvement has long been needed in this district. We have a budget for that, which provides for the best of swimming pools, ball grounds, landscaping, and—"

"And which also, Woodrow Jones, provides for a large amount of graft for you and your group!" The voice in his ear again, unmistakable.

Woodrow Jones' nerves pounded. His fat cheeks quivered. He didn't want to go on. He almost felt sick. Yet he knew he must go on, or probably lose the election. He went on. His voice had a quaver to it and the audience stared at him closely. Already they sensed the exposed insincerity in his tone. His friends back of him looked worried.

"Item four on our platform—I am going to see to it that each and every destitute family in our district is taken care of properly. Since this matter is close to my heart, I've gone to the extent of compiling a list of such needy cases—"

"Could you produce this mythical list, Mr. Jones?" asked the unseen voice back of his head.

Though the evening was cool, Jones took out a handkerchief and mopped his perspiring brow. His speech, as he went on desperately, began to blossom out with "ers" and "ahs" and coughs and hesitations. No one knew how much he was suffering.

"And now the—er—last and perhaps most important part of our platform—reduction of racketeering. I'm going to stamp it out. I—"

"Is that so?" spoke the voice that was so much like his conscience. "Last night you and your col-

leagues, in a secret meeting, promised the racketeering interests that they would not be unduly prosecuted—for a cut! What about that, Mr. Jones?"

Woodrow Jones swayed a little, speechless. To the audience, he seemed to be listening, but there was nothing to listen to! Yet he was listening, to something they couldn't hear.

"You know you're a bald-faced hypocrite!" said the plugging voice at his elbow. "Tissues, lies, rotten deception is what you've just passed out. How can you stand there like a noble leader when you're nothing but a cheap, chiseling grafter? Have you heard of Inferno, Jones? When you get there, you'll make lying campaign speeches endlessly, with this voice in your ear!"

Woodrow Jones' face turned putty-colored. His friends leaped forward as he tottered a little. But before they came up, the voice had said: "You won't run for the election, Jones. Because if you do, this voice of your conscience will haunt you to the insane asylum!"

Jones went temporarily mad. In a screaming voice he renounced his candidacy. Fighting off his cohorts who tried to drag him away, he shrieked out the confession that all he had said was a pack of lies.

CHAPTER II

A Midnight Visitor

LEDA NORRIS awoke in the dead of the night with a queer, stifled feeling that some one had come into her bedroom. She had heard nothing, and could see nothing as she snapped on her bedside lamp, but the sensation did not leave her.

Some thing—some *presence*—was in her room!

She tried to convince herself that she was being silly, but terror rose in a swift tide as she seemed to hear footfalls going toward the open window. But not a thing was to be seen that might cause such a sound! She opened her mouth to scream—

"Leda! Leda, please don't be frightened!" said a voice.

The curtains at the window moved. Something seemed to be going out to the fire escape.

The girl's terror drained out with a rush. "Lyle!" she called eagerly. "Lyle Trent! Is it you? I can't see you, but it was your voice—"

The curtains remained rigidly spread for a moment, then rustled back into place. Soft footfalls came toward the bed.

"Yes, Leda, it's I," returned the man's voice, from a spot over her upturned face. "I'm invisible, by a scientific trick. But I'm here, in the flesh. I hadn't meant you to awake, or talk to you. I just came to see your face, in the moonlight—" The voice faltered.

Leda Norris sat up wonderingly. "Oh, Lyle, it's so good to hear your voice again! But why are you invisible?" She shuddered a bit. "It's almost like talking to a ghost!"

"Turn off the light," suggested the invisible man. "That way you won't notice so much. I'll have to remain—invisible."

The girl obeyed, puzzled. The side of her bed creaked as the unseen man sat down on it.

As Trent remained silent, she spoke again. "Lyle, why haven't I heard from you for two years? Two long, eternal years! I meant what I said before you left to study in Europe—that I'd wait. I'd wait forever for you, Lyle. I still—"

"No, Leda," interrupted Trent. "We—we mustn't talk of those things. I'd hoped you had forgotten."

"I see," Leda's voice broke. "You don't care for me any more. There's another woman, Lyle? Don't be afraid to tell me. After all, two years is a long time—"

"No," said Trent. "There's no other woman." He paused. "I still love you, Leda—and always will."

"Then why—"

"Let me explain. You remember the accident I had while at Leyden—an explosion in the physics laboratory?"

"Yes, that was the last I heard from you." Leda caught her breath. "I was so worried for you, Lyle! You didn't write me much about it. Did you get hurt?"

"Oh, slightly. But that explosion was really the key to my researches. It was caused by the transfer of light-energy through a shield of solid metal. I won't go into detail, Leda, but when a light photon hits an atom, an electron in the atom jumps to a new orbit. When the electron jumps back, the photon is released. The photon, if given enough stimulus, will jump from atom to atom, and will eventually work its way through solid matter. And almost at its original speed of light."

"I have a modification of that first crude shield completely surrounding my body. It's really a flexible, ventilated metal mesh, not very heavy, with interstices so fine that the human eye cannot see them. I can breathe comfortably, perspire normally and move freely. But you can't see either me or my suit of mesh. The mesh carries a certain fine electric current, from special batteries at my waist, which kicks the light photons along as they arrive. For instance, a light photon striking my back is kicked right through my body to my front, and there radiated—as though I hadn't been in its way in the first place.

"And that's the reason I'm invisible, because light goes through me, even more perfectly than light penetrates glass.* There was just one other detail. I had

* This is a very logical means of invisibility. Photons, recently discovered, are corpuscles of light energy, which like radio, travel in wave lengths, rather than like the waves of the sea, i.e., they are associated mathematical quantities. Photons, or Light Quanta, as they were formerly called, are ejected from alkaline metals at high speed, depending upon the frequency of the light. Einstein has shown that a photon has kinetic energy, which therefore would theoretically react as Lyle Trent's discovery revealed to him. Provided the metallic ejection medium was present, the result would be invisibility through lack of interception of the light quanta.—Ed.

to devise a way to see, for the light photons are kicked past the retinas of my eyes too. I wear a pair of intricately designed goggles whose lenses intercept and change ultra-violet rays to visible radiations for my eyes. Things look a bit queer to me, but I see almost as well by that means as normally. But that's enough explanation of the scientific end of it."

LEDA had listened attentively. "Lyle, you're a wonderful scientist," she breathed. "I always knew you would be. I'm proud of your ability—"

Trent interrupted almost harshly.

"But after I'd perfected this means of invisibility, Leda, it occurred to me what it would mean, if I let it out. I thought of invisible spies! Invisible armies! Invisible deeds of crime!"

He let out his breath sharply.

"I decided my discovery must remain a secret with myself. I didn't publish my results. I almost came to the point of destroying all my notes and apparatus. Then I thought of another thing. In the right hands, the power of invisibility could be a beneficent thing. And because I couldn't trust anyone else, with any certainty, I decided to apply its benefits myself."

Something gripped Leda's hand suddenly, an invisible hand covered with what felt like smooth, flexible steel.

"Leda, I'm devoting my life to this venture. I'm going out in the world and do what I can for its betterment. I'm going to track down dangerous criminals, break up crime-rings. With my invisibility I'm going to ferret out all that's rotten and wrong and bring it to light. The dark things can't stand light."

He gave a short, earnest laugh. "I'm going to start a one-man reform. I may not get as far as I hope, but I'm going to try my best!"

The girl squeezed the metal hand impulsively, unmindful of the sharp tingle of electricity from the contact.

"Is it any wonder that I loved you from the start, Lyle? I could see into your soul—"

"Leda—" Trent's voice became solemn and heavy. "Leda, you see now, don't you? That I must devote all my time and energy, all my life, to this thing. I want you, but it would be unfair to marry you—under these circumstances. My activities will take me all over the country, perhaps over the world. I might not see you for months at a time. It wouldn't work—it can't be. You must forget me—"

The girl was sobbing. "I understand," she choked. "But, Lyle, can't I see you—just once—it's been two years—"

"No!" Trent said firmly. "If you did, it would make it harder—for both of us. It's bad enough that I can see you, look at your eyes, and think of—what might have been."

A floorboard creaked as he arose.

"I came back today because this is the anniversary of our first meeting. Remember?—the prom—moonlight ride—. I'll come back once a year, on this day,

to talk to you for a while. Goodbye, Leda—darling!"

Footfalls went toward the window, the curtains bent aside, and the unseen man was gone as though he had been no more than the breeze that blew in from the river.

CHAPTER III

Trent Begins His Mission

"COME in, Steve."

Politician Steve, chewing an unlighted cigar, waited till the secretary had gone out. Then he turned to the fat, thick-lipped man behind the desk.

"Okay. Spill it, Pete," he said. He glanced once more around the room to make sure they were alone. No one else was in the room besides the two men. He could see that.

Lawyer Pete licked his fat lips and began. "The tenement district in Ward Six has been condemned by the mayor. My client—you know who—doesn't want those buildings torn down. They have standing value. Suppose we remodeled them instead?"

He smirked knowingly.

"You know, they can be fixed up pretty nice for about a hundred grand. My client can then raise the rent and clear fifty grand in a year. If you can square it with the City Hall, your—er—share would be 10%. What do you say, Steve?"

Jake's mangled cigar traveled from one corner of his grin to another. "You taking me for a sucker, Pete? Make it 20% and I'll play ball. I'm risking a lot; finagling the court records and all."

"All right," growled the fat lawyer. "It's a deal. We'll start remodeling in a month. And of course, we'll use the very *best* of materials!" He smirked again.

Steve laughed. "Yeah, sure. I can imagine that gouger, Paulson, giving out any more than—"

"*Ssh*, damn you!" warned the lawyer. "I've told you my client's name must never be mentioned."

"So what? There's nobody in this room except us."

"No there's nobody else here," admitted the lawyer. "But don't talk in your sleep. If this ever got out, you and me and my client would be sitting on top of a volcano and—"

Steve's cigar stopped gyrating suddenly and his head came up sharply. His eyes began to pop out as he looked at the secretary's empty desk across the office.

"Look!" he gasped. "What's that pencil doing jumping around? It looks like it's *writing*—Pete—for God's sake—"

HORRIFIED, the two men watched the animated pencil. Suddenly it laid itself down. The paper on which it had been writing rose off the desk top. Catlike footfalls approached the two men across the thick rug. The paper floated along about five feet off the floor. It approached till it dangled before the

two men's eyes. They saw neat shorthand script on it.

A voice came out of blank air.

"Gentlemen, how does it feel to be sitting on a volcano? Or how would you like to live in slums, as thousands of poor souls have to, because men like you and your boss Paulson won't tear them down?"

Lawyer Pete was gasping like a fish. Politician Steve was crossing himself superstitiously. Both of them were speechless.

"No, I'm not a ghost," continued the voice without a visible source. "I'm an invisible man. I'm out to get men like you. I have a complete shorthand record of every word you two connivers spoke."

The paper flaunted before their blood-drained faces. Then it began to fold neatly across the middle. Unseen fingers tucked it into empty air where a man's pocket might be.

"The mayor will be interested to see this. Pleasant dreams, gentlemen!"

The depressions of footprints in the rug moved toward the door. The door opened and then closed.

IN a rollicking good humor, Ted Marne ambled out of the beer parlor and headed uptown. He might find a few cronies up at the Topsy Tavern. Cross here. No—red light. What the hell, what's a red light? He could dodge the cars. Here we go!

Ted Marne got half way across the busy thoroughfare and then had a sickly feeling that he was trapped. One car passing another was bearing down on him. Damn, if he could only see a little clearer . . . squealing brakes, but too late. The car was going to hit him squarely, probably kill him at that speed—

A firm hand grasped his arm and yanked him back, just in time. Then the same firm grip propelled him forward at a run. Ted Marne stumbled up the curb. But he stumbled now from nervousness. He was cold sober from fright and the narrow escape.

"Thanks, pal," he said, turning to his rescuer.

But there was no one there. Yet he still felt an iron grip on his arm, steadying him. Marne blinked and experimentally wiggled his arm. The grip remained.

"Are you all right?" whispered a voice in his ear.

Ted Marne was not the scary type. Nor was his mind slow.

"Okay, Houdini," he said. He spoke out of the corner of his mouth softly, so that passing people

wouldn't think he was talking to himself. "You do it with mirrors. Now who or what in hell are you?"

"I'm an invisible man."

"I don't drink that kind of stuff," returned Marne. "I'm the best damned reporter in this town and I've seen some funny things, but Hannah help me—an invisible man!"

"A reporter? You work for a newspaper? Will you come with me to my rooms, where we can talk privately?"

A HALF hour later Ted Marne sat down and watched the cushion of a stuffed chair across from him sink under an unseen weight. He lit a cigarette and listened while the disembodied voice introduced its owner and briefly explained the method of invisibility.

"So I'm as human as you are, if you had any doubts," concluded the voice, "but invisible through those scientific means. Do you see?"

"No, I don't. I can't see you at all!" Marne grinned impishly. Then he became serious. "Say, that's quite a thing, Trent. But why are you going to all the trouble of explaining about yourself to me?"

"You're a reporter. I'm a story to you—"

"Oh no, you aren't!" contradicted Marne. "I could write a peach of a piece about you, but the editor

Steve's eyes began to pop. "Look! he gasped. "That pencil's writing!"

wouldn't print it. If he did, the readers wouldn't believe it. You're just too damned unbelievable. But thanks anyway."

The cushion expanded. Footfalls began to sound softly around the room, as though Trent were pacing thoughtfully.

"Marne," he said finally, "I want you to write me up, as a favor, and get it printed."

"Okay," sighed Marne. "You saved my life, I can't say no. But what's your game?"

"I've been thinking of this step for some time. I need publicity to carry on my campaign effectively."

Marne sat up. "Publicity—campaign? Let's have it. What campaign?"

"My campaign of getting human rats! At first I just prowled the night streets and stopped petty hold-ups. Later I gave police the information that broke up a dope ring. And more recently I was behind the indictment of Paulson!"

Marne's mouth was open. "I begin to see now!" he murmured. Trent went on.



"But that's just pecking at it. I want to go after bigger and bigger game. And I want all those who indulge in shady and criminal dealings to know that an invisible man can expose their every scheme. To know that I may be at their elbow at any moment—listening, watching! I want to put the fear of me into every guilty heart in the city and country! Can you write me up that way, Marne?"

"Can I?" The reporter let out a whoop. "Boy, let me tell you I can, and will! And I have just the name for you. Hereafter Trent, you'll be known as the *Invisible Robinhood!*"

CHAPTER IV

"Beware the Invisible Robinhood!"

BIG Fellow Marlin looked out over the midwestern city spread beyond the window of his high quarters in the building he owned. He frowned as a king might frown. He had the right to. He was virtual ruler of the city. He was the power behind the puppet mayor's throne.

"This invisible man stuff!" he grunted.

He went back to his breakfast table and picked up the paper. The headline stared him in the face, though he tried to ignore it.

"Invisible Robinhood Cleans Up Westavia!"

After the gory recital of smashed organization, the writer, one Ted Marne, went off in his usual vein.

"Do you know that the Invisible Robinhood may at this moment be at your side? He comes and goes like the wind, unseen, unheard. He roams the country, searching out crime and racketeering. He may strike anywhere, wherever his hand is needed to help the forces of law, order, decency and honesty. If you have any guilty secret he may know it. If you contemplate any shady undertaking, beware that the Invisible Robinhood does not know of it, to the last rotten detail. He carries on. And remember—he *may be at your side at this moment!*"

Big Fellow Marlin threw down the paper disgustfully. But he could not prevent his eyes from whisking around the room. Nor could he control the slight chill that ran up his spine at the thought that an invisible man might be watching his every move.

The telephone rang. Marlin picked up the receiver.

"Hello . . . Hello, 21! What's up? . . . *What!* . . . You mean you won't do it? Why not? . . . The Invisible Ro—nuts! You better do it! . . . Which do you fear most, 21, that publicity myth or me? . . . I'll ruin you! By God, I'll ruin you!"

He was still fuming a few minutes later when a cautious knock on the door heralded the entrance of Dapper Mike.

"Hello, Mike. What's on your mind?"

Mike swallowed. "I was just wondering, Big Fellow. Maybe we'd better sort of lay low with that new gambling joint. They say—" He stopped to swallow again.

"Yes, what?" urged Marlin.

"They say *he's* in town!"

"You mean that damned Invisible Robinhood?" roared the Big Fellow. "Who says *he's* in town?"

"I got it from Joe. Joe got it from Barney. Barney says they're talking about it down at headquarters. I'm not taking any chances, Big Fellow." Mike glanced around the room nervously. "No soap on our deal."

Marlin arose with studied calm, and sauntered to his wall-safe, behind a picture of cows in a field. "You know what I have in here, Mike," he said, twirling the combination. "Blackmail papers on you that—"

"Don't open that!" almost screamed the gambler. "*He* may be in this room now, waiting for that! Didn't you read the Westavia case?—how he let Walser open *his* private safe, then knocked him out and used the stuff in court? What's in your safe can ruin you and me and half the town. Don't open it!"

Marlin hesitated and then drew back, replacing the picture. His eyes sneaked around the room apprehensively. He flushed at Mike's sober nod.

"Oh, get out, you damned chicken!" Marlin roared. "Get out!"

Later in the day, Marlin was speaking to his two closest henchmen. "21's place gets a nice bomb, see? And Dapper Mike gets a slug in the back. They've both turned yellow. Got it straight, boys?"

"No, we ain't!" said one of the two gunmen flatly. "We're not doing any dirty work right now. At Westavia, *he* got the whole works, just tracing down a guy who bumped off another guy."

"You see, boss," said the other gunman, "the Invisible Robinhood's in town!"

BUT at that moment, Lyle Trent was far from that city, and had no idea of coming to it. He was in one of his several secret quarters, talking with Ted Marne, the only man who knew where those places were.

"Your publicity campaign for me has been a marvelous success, Marne," said Trent.

"I'll say it has!" boasted the reporter. "You've been Page One for eight months. My best line, the one I get in every time, is—'Remember, he may be at your side this very minute!' I'll bet everyone shivers ten times a day, thinking of that." He grimaced. "In fact, I've got to believing it myself. I shiver sometimes when I know you aren't around!"

Trent chuckled. "Guilty conscience, Marne? But I don't know what I'd do without you. You've followed me around the country like a faithful dog, as my personal press agent. You've been in danger, too."

"Don't I know it!" responded the reporter. "I had to think fast when the boys at Westavia wanted to take me for a ride. It was easy, though. I just looked around a little and said, 'Okay, Robinhood, give 'em the works!' You should have seen them

duck and run."

He burst out suddenly.

"But say what do you mean I *followed* you around? Didn't I *plan* the whole thing? Didn't I insist on jumping from one corner to the other of the country, so as to give people the idea that you were everywhere? Let me tell you, Trent, it's worked. You're in every city in the country, at all times, in the minds of all those who have reason to *fear* your coming. You've started reforms in cities you've never been within a hundred miles of!"

"You're right, Marne," agreed Trent. "Some little town down south sent me a check for a thousand dollars for driving out their worst local character, a cruel landlord, who claimed a voice in his ear kept haunting him till he fled. Yet I was never there."

Marne puffed at an expensive cigar contentedly. "And don't think you're known just here in America. I've been releasing all my accounts to the International Service. Why, I'll bet there isn't a soul on God's green earth that hasn't heard of the Invisible Robinhood, even the big-wigs in Europe—"

Trent interrupted. "Say that again!"

"I said, 'even the big-wigs in Europe'; why?"

"What's doing in Europe at the present?"

"Everything rotten that you can think of," retorted Marne. "For one thing, there's a big war brewing. The undeclared war going on at present is just the preliminary for the big bout which may break any minute—"

"War!" ejaculated the bodiless voice of Trent. "The most senseless folly of mankind. Innocent people murdered and impoverished. Suffering, misery, famine—"

"Yeah. But what can you do about it?"

A steel-like hand gripped Marne's shoulder, half dragging him to his feet. "Start packing, Marne. We're going to Europe!"

"Aw, Trent, you can't—"

"Make reservations on the Normandie," commanded the incisive voice of the unseen man.

Marne shrugged and then grinned. "One or two staterooms, Trent?"

CHAPTER V

The Invisible Robinhood's Secret

THE Leader condescended to read the newspaper account, suitably translated, that his Foreign Minister handed him with a grim look.

"European War Averted!" boldly stated the headline.

It went on. "The Facts, by Ted Marne. In the past four months, the European situation has changed from a powder-keg ready to blow sky-high to a farce of tangled intrigue. Five Big Powers, ready at any moment for attack or defense, are today ready for neither. Their best and most secret offense plans are the common knowledge of every country's capital.

"What Power planned to cross what mountain pass to attack what little thorn in its side? Everybody knows! What gigantic army was ready to invade what open territory to get at what enemy for a killing blow, all in secret? Everybody knows! Every man in the street knows all the other great military coups laboriously plotted out by would-be Napoleons.

"And how is this all known? Because the Invisible Robinhood, humanity's champion, stole all those guarded plans from under their respective noses and mailed printed copies everywhere except Timbuctoo. The Timbuctoos aren't particularly interested.

"Unseen, silent as a ghost, quick as a tiger, the Invisible Robinhood sees all, hears all, knows all. All you ministers of murder you crack-pot war-lords, you dispensers of cannon fodder—are under his watchful, cunning eye. You can't make a move he doesn't know of. You can't plan a single big drive or secret offensive. His mailed fist is mightier than yours. Remember—he may be at your elbow this very minute!"

"So!" grunted The Leader. "It is this Invisible Robinhood who gave our great triple attack plan, on which our staff worked for three years, to our enemies, and not the ten spies we shot. We must get him out of the way, or we will never be able to make war."

"That will not be easy," said the Foreign Minister. "He is as described—unseen, unheard." He glanced around uneasily, and shivered. "He is everywhere—and nowhere!"

The Leader frowned. "Who is this Ted Marne? Where is he?"

"His only confidant. We have checked his movements." The Foreign Minister leaned forward. "Perhaps we can strike at the Invisible Robinhood through him. He is in this city at present. We have papers—"

The Minister drew them from his portfolio. "These are facsimiles of our plans, sent to other capitals, signed by him. That makes him a spy! We can shoot Ted Marne! Then we can concentrate on tracking down the Invisible Robinhood."

"Good!" exclaimed The Leader. "Have Marne arrested and brought here for a quick trial and sentence."

An hour later, Ted Marne was ushered into The Leader's presence, between two rows of armed guards. The Leader's eyes were cold. Marne glared back defiantly.

"You can't do anything to me!" he said confidently.

"I'm an American citizen."

"You're a spy!" shot back The Leader. "I have proof here. These papers—"

He reached to the side of his desk, but there was nothing there. The Leader looked puzzled, then dumbfounded, for no one had been in the room, outside of his trusted personal guard, since the Foreign Minister had left.

At that moment loud voices sounded from the corridor and a man burst in. He was the American consul. "I've been informed," he snapped, "that one Ted

Marne is unlawfully held here, under suspicion as a spy. Have you any proof? If not, free him immediately."

"Where can those papers be?" appealed The Leader to his minister. "Who could have taken them?"

"The Invisible Robinhood, of course!" grinned Ted Marne. "Didn't I tell you he might be at your elbow?"

"Guards, lock the doors!" roared The Leader. "We'll get him!"

"You won't lock the doors on us!" stormed the American consul. "Who do you think you are?"

Helplessly, The Leader watched as the consul and Ted Marne stalked out. They walked strangely apart, as though a third, unseen, man were between them.

IT was the day, and all day Leda Norris was in a fever of impatience. Would he keep his promise to come back once a year, on the anniversary of their first meeting?

The hours passed. Night came. Eleven o'clock. Leda was now alone in her room. One minute to twelve. . . .

The curtains rustled at the window. Soft footfalls came toward her.

"Lyle!"

"Leda!"

The voice came from just before her, but when she stretched out her arms, involuntarily, she felt nothing. She heard him step to the side.

"No, Leda. We mustn't. Sit down and I'll talk to you for a while."

The girl obediently sat down, then looked at the opposite chair. "I'm glad you remembered, Lyle. Just to hear your voice—" She broke off and began again. "The Invisible Robinhood! I've read all about you. Every word, over and over. I'm proud of you, Lyle. You're doing more good in this world than any one man before in history!"

"Only because of my power of invisibility," returned Trent. "Any other decent man could do the same. But when I'm gone, my secret goes with me. It's too dangerous, in the wrong hands. The process may never be discovered again. I found it only because of that accident, which gave me the clue—one chance out of a million. So it was a lucky accident—but a cursed one too!"

His voice was surprisingly vehement on the last phrase.

"Why do you say that, Lyle?"

"Because it's kept me from you, Leda!"

"Oh, I see."

Silence fell between them. The silence of two souls

who are meant for each other, but are kept apart by the strange workings of destiny.

Leda felt like crying bitterly, as she so often had since that last time, but conquered her emotion bravely, knowing he would wait for her.

She stared fixedly at the empty chair in which he sat. "I can almost picture you there, Lyle," she murmured. "Your tall, straight body—grave, boyish face—curly hair— Lyle! I'm never to see you again, in all my life?"

"Never!" said Trent, almost in a croak.

LATER, when Trent returned to his rooms, Marne was waiting for him.

"Say, Trent, I've got a great idea!" the reporter chortled. "I'm going to run your picture! What's publicity without pix? I'm going to run a full rotogravure pic of you, in color—" He laughed ringingly. "Yeah, Trent, all in grey! Can't you just picture people looking at a ten-by-twelve blank space labeled 'The Invisible Robinhood' and—"

Marne choked on his laugh. Somehow he sensed the air of gloom surrounding the other. He had been with him long enough to know his moods by a subtle aura he radiated.

"Sorry, Trent," mumbled Marne. "Seen Leda, eh? You know, that girl really loves you. She's written me a million letters, asking about you, telling me to take good care of you. Trent, aren't you making a mistake? Why not marry her? You could take her with you. She'd follow you anywhere—to Mars, even, if you started a reform there. And you'd be happier, too. I know it's none of my business, but—"

"Marne" said the unseen man in a low, harsh voice, "you've never seen me, and you've often wondered why, I know. You know the story of the accident at Leyden that gave me the secret of invisibility. Look!—"

A switch snapped. With startling abruptness, Marne saw a figure before him. It was completely sheathed in what looked like fine chain-mail. The gauntleted hands reached up to unfasten the helmet-like hood. Marne gasped.

The face revealed was hideous. Great burn-scars obliterated what had once been a strong, handsome face. There was little nose or hair. Only purple folds of lumpy scar-tissue.

"Leda does not know," said Lyle Trent, replacing the hood.

Ted Marne bowed his head in his hands. He felt like crying, but went out and got drunk instead.

THE END

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FANTASTIC INVENTIONS

PERPETUAL MOTION MACHINES

An impossible invention which has lured many inventors

CONTRARY to all logic, many inventors have sought to create a machine which would work until it wore out, without an application of outside force to keep it going. This is a complete fallacy, and a little serious thinking will make it apparent.



A water wheel is run by sun-power

At first thought, a water wheel is such a machine, but it is not. It is evident that it is the sun which makes the wheel go by raising the water.

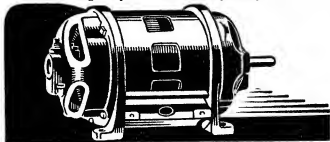
A Foucault pendulum might be said to be a perpetual motion machine, since it continues to describe an arc as the earth revolves. But here again, a phenomenon of nature, evidenced in a machine, depends wholly on an outside force, motion of the earth.

Many things occur in nature and in mechanics which those inventive dreamers who seek the will-o-the-wisp of a perpetually moving machine point out as evidence that it is not an impossibility. But when they try to carry out these apparent instances in an inventive manner, creating all sorts of machines, they run up against the obstacle of impossibility.

They have tried to use magnetism, rigging up complicated systems of inter-operating magnets, and have achieved some remarkably baffling machines, but upon examination, each has shown itself to possess some outside motive power, either intentionally placed there by the inventor, or not realized by him as such.

Basically, all these magnetic devices have been nothing more than electric motors, in fantastic forms. They need a power input to activate them.

The force of gravity has been used by many in an effort



An electric motor operates magnetically

to produce perpetual motion. Many fantastic devices were created. One, for instance, is a wheel equipped with buckets, something like a ferris wheel geared to an upright elevator conveyor, operating on the continuous belt prin-

ciple. It uses metal balls to make it go, the balls ascending the elevator being propelled up by the geared wheel which is turned by the weight of other balls continually being dumped in at the top, and rolling out of the buckets at the bottom, to return once more to the elevator to be raised again. Thus a series of balls is supposed to keep the wheel going. The theory of the inventor who devised this one is simple. Inasmuch as the distance the balls had to be lifted was shorter than the distance the same balls traveled around the wheel's circumference from the top, it *seemed* that there would be surplus unexpended gravity power left

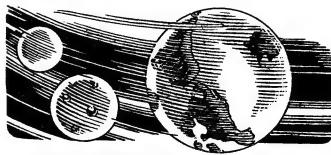


One form of hypothetical perpetual motion machine

to be utilized in moving the wheel. And as long as the wheel moved, the balls would continue to become available for still more power-producing descents. In fact, however, the friction of the wheel, the gears, etc., needed far more power than supplied by the balls. It is a law of physics that it is impossible to get more power out of an apparatus than is put into it.

These inventors persisted because they pointed to the motion of the earth and the stars as perpetual motion. But again they erred. The motion of every heavenly body is dependent on other bodies. If we analyze deeply, we come to the Einstein precepts of relativity, and discover all motion to be relative. A lone planet, plunging at incredible speed through absolutely empty space could not be said to be moving. There would be no basis of comparison.

Perpetual motion machines are impossible.



Motion of heavenly bodies depends on mutual gravitation



Death stalked Darak of Werg at every step, but the Royal Bracelet and the Princess of Werg meant far more than one man's life

She was startled but showed no fear of Darak's swordpoint to her white throat

The EMPRESS OF MARS

By **ROSS ROCKLYNNE**

CHAPTER I In a Strange Land

FLAT on my stomach I lay, heart beating wildly, the mudflats of the Thasser Canal a veritable stench in my nostrils. Above me, on the sagging plankings of the rotting Jador wharf, I heard the ribald oath of the Captain of the Guards, as he feared that I had escaped his clutches and his thirsting dirk.

Scarce three feet distant lapped the foul waters of the Thasser, dark, evil, mysterious in the misty darkness of the Martian night. And out there, on the dark waters, rode at anchor a single houseboat, blunt-browed, three-cabined. Farther down the dock, whence went shipping to all the far-flung corners of the dangerous, mad, warlike world, were other more stately craft, chief amongst them the palace boat of the self-styled Empress of Mars.

Oaths rose on the night air, and I knew that not this easily would Miran Borg, Captain of the Royal City Guards, give up the search. Nay! My dead

bleeding body he'd have, as warning to other uncertified foreigners. I cursed the moment I had, in my foolhardiness, exposed myself in the full glare of light for my typically angular Wergite features were no asset in the cruel, barbarous land of Crill.

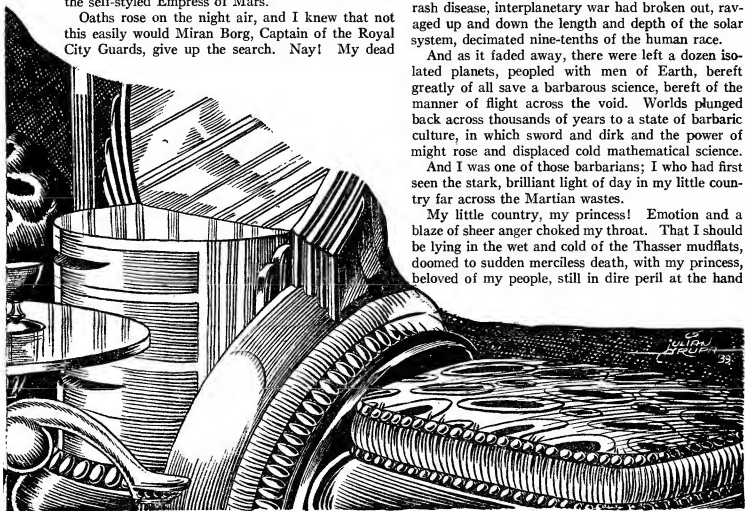
Off to my right I heard a dull thud, as a harran bokka flung himself from the rotting wharf, landed with catlike feet on the Thasser mudflats. I saw his eyes flash in the gloom as they turned on my hiding place. Slowly, warily, he crept toward me. And I, weaponless, in very fear of death, waited.

Mad, warlike world! As I lay there, with death encircling me, creeping in on me with sure tread, my thoughts spun with nostalgia to that blue world which men called Earth. My mind spun back to the ancient civilizations three thousand years gone, when all the planets that rushed eternally about the Sun had been settled, colonized, united in a common bond of friendship. And then, fearsome thing, like some rash disease, interplanetary war had broken out, ravaged up and down the length and depth of the solar system, decimated nine-tenths of the human race.

And as it faded away, there were left a dozen isolated planets, peopled with men of Earth, bereft greatly of all save a barbarous science, bereft of the manner of flight across the void. Worlds plunged back across thousands of years to a state of barbaric culture, in which sword and dirk and the power of might rose and displaced cold mathematical science.

And I was one of those barbarians; I who had first seen the stark, brilliant light of day in my little country far across the Martian wastes.

My little country, my princess! Emotion and a blaze of sheer anger choked my throat. That I should be lying in the wet and cold of the Thasser mudflats, doomed to sudden merciless death, with my princess, beloved of my people, still in dire peril at the hand



of the cruel Empress! Wrong, it was. *Wrong!*

THE harran* crept along toward me, crouched.

Not yet had his eyes picked me out of the gloom, but I saw his short-sword, clutched to the ready in his hand. I drew my naked, freezing hands up under me, braced them on the stinking surface of the mud-flats. The harran paused under the shadow of the wharf. And then, his eyes dilating, his breath coming hoarsely, he saw me, and made as if to give warning.

Too late! With the speed of a darak†—indeed, my public name is Darak—I leaped from the noisome ground, flung myself full at him. Had he a moment's warning, some slight knowledge of my far-famed speed, I were dead, with the short of his sword piercing me through to the heart.

But ere he could utter a syllable, I grasped him about the throat. With a single motion I flung him across my bent knee, and the sound of his shattered vertebrae was a sharp crack in the night.

Then, crouching, hoping against hope that sounds of the conflict might not have reached the ears of my pursuers, I waited. Vain hope! Came a voice, harsh, rasping, from above me.

"What say you, Rinui? You've found him?"

Well knowing the need of action, my lips ground out the harsh gutturals of the Crillian tongue.

"A trice to these littered shores, Miran Borg! By Jaos, I've ruined my leg!"

"To the devil with your leg, then!" snarled Miran Borg. "You've seen a sign of the Wergite?"

"Gone," I growled surlily. "Best we continue the search down to Cratlas Pier. And may I be the one to sever his guts from his body!"

"Five shabra to the man who does! But 'ware of him, for he is large of body and swift of mind!" snarled Miran Borg, and then came his voice, shouting orders. Feet pounding, down the wharf, away to the landing. I stilled the pound of my heart, and drew a heartfelt breath of relief.

Then, softly, exultantly, I crept down to the shores of the Thasser, and plunged silently into its polar-cooled waters.

I glided out from the shadow of the wharf, propelling myself with short, powerful strokes, my nose barely above water.

* The Harrans are the police of Crill, members of the so-called nobility, who exercise their position and rank as a sort of National Guard, and peace-time member of the regular army. They are all officers, trained to command the bokkas, or privates, during wartime. Theirs is a life of fighting and murder on the slightest pretext, their greatest delight being the clash of swords and the spilling of blood. But they have a code of honor which can be depended upon, in spite of the fact that their motto is "Death." On Earth, in the 20th century, they would have been classed as soldiers of fortune, although unlike those ancient adventurers, they are an integral part of the government of the nation which they serve. They receive no pay, their rank entitling them to take what they want, by right of sword.—*Thompson's Sociology of the Martian Nations.*

† The Darak is a fleet, courageous animal, famed for its dexterity and fighting ability. Native of the mountainous regions.—*Fauna of Mars, Settlement Survey.*

The shore fell behind, as I headed midstream, bound for that single, blunt-prowed house-boat.

To its starboard quarter I went, my flesh chilled not so much from the freezing waters as from the feel of obscene water creatures brushing against me, or coiling about my naked legs. Now the Jador wharf was hid from me by the uprising hulk of the apparently tenantless craft, and I threw one arm over the gun-whale, and swiftly drew myself over the side.

Dripping water, I came to a wary crouch, my hand ready to my short-sword, which I had acquired from my assailant of a few moments gone, well aware that death lurked at every turn of a corner.

There was no sound on all the world now, save the far away scream of a yammir,* from far on the other side of this monstrous Martian city.

I heard a sound. I wheeled, in a flash had my short-sword out and ready to action. And it were well that perceptions on that night were keened to the utmost, for bearing down on me, upraised sword glinting, bestial face cruel with the murder lust, came a very devil of a man!

"HAVE at you!" the giant roared, and his sword cut the air with a shriek, so narrowly missing me that I heard the singing of the metal as it flashed past my ear.

I leaped back, struck at his short sword savagely, and I imagine my own face was not a pretty thing to see, as we went at it hook and tongs. No amateur sword play here! Swifter than lightning he gave feint for feint, thrust for thrust, counterpoint for counterpoint.

"Die!" he cried, and his sword surely and vengefully pushed forward through a space I had occupied but a fraction of a second before. I laughed savagely, but wasted not my breath on idle words, for I was pitted against a swordsman of cunning and brawn.

Slowly but surely, using a time-honored trick, I allowed him to press me back against the cabin-wall. For a well-versed antagonist the rule is to build up his confidence—then, a flash of steel, a swift counterpoint, a thrust to the heart—and victory!

Thus I knew it would be, and thus it was. A final parry, a diabolical feigned weakness, and he rushed at me. Too late he saw my ruse! He gave vent to a single whimpering cry as he fairly hurled himself onto the point of my sharp blade. He sagged, and his life spurted from his mouth, staining his dirty beard crimson.

I braced my foot against his massive body, and drew out my weapon. Stooping, I wiped the bloody sword on his tunic, then again came to my feet.

Warily I lay my hand to a companionway door, the

* The Yammir is one of the few birds of Mars. It is long-legged, extremely fragile in appearance, but agile in flight. It appears only at night, and its scream is entirely out of proportion with its appearance, being a shrill noise of deafening proportions. On Earth, its voice would be truly thunderous but on Mars, the thin atmosphere serves to lighten the pitch, and thin the volume.—*Fauna of Mars, Settlement Survey.*



virus of excitement running like strong red wine in my body.

I stiffened. What was that? The sound of a weeping woman? A woman, imprisoned against her will?

Abruptly, I flung open the door, and stood on the threshold of a dimly lit room. Out came my sword, for since the day when first I had departed my beloved homeland with the commission to return my abducted princess to the land of her fathers, death had walked side by side with me, and it were a poor day that saw no battle to the death.

But Death in that room did not await me. For Death is not a woman, particularly a woman beautiful beyond belief, ravishing, even with the tears staining the perfect bloom of her oval, lovely cheeks. She was cowering in a corner of the room, a single short garment fastened about her shapeliness, her high breast rising and falling in her fear, her heavy black hair falling in lovely torrents over her shoulders.

CHAPTER II

Into Ancient Jador

NOW what I say here you will perhaps deride, for in one moment, you will inquire, how can the oldest, holiest of emotions come into the heart of a man, with a sureness that will brook no denial? Know you then, that one moment can, in the mind, become as a thousand years. I have heard men tell of how

A very devil of a man
leaped at me as I drew
myself over the side of
the houseboat.

they had first looked deep into their loves' unscarred souls, and had seen in one moment—or a thousand years—all the virtues of woman since time immemorial, parading there, and, with scarce a conscious thought, knew that this was the woman for whom they would willingly fight a whole world!

Shall I continue to explain? Or shall I not attempt to explain a doubtless unexplainable mystery, whose roots lie at the very foundations of life itself? Good enough! Suffice to say, then, that as I gazed at her speechless, the rest of the world, and all the threatening dangers in it, receded from my thoughts. A burning emotion gripped me, my blood a pounding torrent in my body. I, Darak of Werg, knew that in this girl lay my destiny.

I took a dazed step toward her, and she cowered back from me, her soft breasts rising and falling convulsively. She saw in my eyes what I felt, and interpreted it wrongly.

"Go away and leave me!" she whispered, her violet eyes flaming.

"You wrong me," I said huskily. "I am not your enemy."

She shrank back as I advanced another step. "How did you gain access to this boat?" she whispered. "How did you vanquish Deodum?"

"I killed him," I replied simply.

"I do not believe you could have killed him! He is too powerful."

I raised my sword to the light of the flickering talow lamp. "The blood of Deodum has stained my weapon," I smiled, as I saw the hope in her eyes. Then I repeated, "I am your friend. I am a refugee, and but a few moments ago escaped death at the hands of the Royal City Guards."

A smile began to curve her lips, and she came toward me and lay her small, white hand on my bare arm. Once again under the spell of her violet eyes, the impulse which rose up in me would not be brooked. I swept her into my arms, her soft lips quivering, her body warm and vibrant against mine. And I could have sworn in that moment that she responded, before her own sweet innocence claimed possession of her.

She twisted savagely free of me, her eyes blazing. Then she struck me, harshly, with animal passion.

"You dare!" she hissed.

MY voice was a faraway thing in my ears, as I stepped back, stood straight, unmoving, white of face. I was not sorry for what I had done, yet I said, "Forgive me, wachin.* I lost myself to your beauty."

There was some hot retort on her lips, but she never

* Wachin—a term of endearment derived from the wachin, now extinct, a very beautiful and tiny animal whose body seemed almost ethereal, so transparent was its flesh, and so delicate the tracery of its violet veins, and its rosy luminous hair. They became susceptible to the germ of the common cold, brought from Earth, and an unchecked epidemic wiped them out.—*Fauna of Mars, Settlement Surv.*

uttered the words. Instead, her violet eyes swept with intense study over my angular features.

"You are Wergite?" she questioned with unwonted eagerness, her lips parted. "You are a spy?"

"My business is none of yours," I responded coldly. "It was ill-luck alone which bade me seek this boat as refuge." Then I relented, and shoved my sword back into its scabbard.

"On the other hand, my mission is well-known in Jador, and the addition of another knowing ear will work no harm. Know then that scarce three score days ago the Princess of Werg, worshipped the length and breadth of my land, was set upon by a marauding band of Crillians, and brought to this country. My country is too small, too illy-armed to proceed against the mightiness of Crill—so, of all volunteers, I was chosen to restore her to her country."

Her look was suddenly very gentle. "You have much hope of succeeding?"

"I return with my princess," I replied, "or else I die. My princess first, and perhaps her bracelet."

"Her bracelet?"

"The talisman of her dynasty. The Royal Hinusian Bracelet, set with the fiery stones of life."

"I have heard much of this fabulous talisman," she said thoughtfully. "I have heard that the rays which radiate from it are as new life to the sick, the invalid, and the dying. I have heard rumor that in Werg all men are deathless." Her eyes were shining. "I have heard that though Werg is the smallest of all the countries on all Mars, still it is the greatest, the noblest. Its peoples are the deathless race! For the rays of the Hinusian Bracelet are powerless in all other countries. For from the very ground of Werg, and only Werg, do the rays that render the bracelet effective come. And you will know where this bracelet is secreted?" she asked gently.

I thrust up the short sleeve of my wet, skin jacket, and showed her the transparent small box strapped above my biceps. She leaned forward, her eyes widening. I turned my shoulder slightly, and she watched the lambent blue flame of the needle as it twisted on its universal joint.

"Where points the needle," I told her, "there is the princess' fabulous bracelet."

"You have seen the princess of Werg?" she questioned me.

"From afar," I made answer. "I could never forget the glorious masses of sun-golden hair which adorn her head. I have no fear I shall know her when she comes to my sight."

SHE nodded and smiled at me. "You need not fear that I will reveal you," she said in a voice that had turned low and thrilling. "I myself am not native to this land. I was a slave, serving in the palace of one of the lesser nobles. Deodum is a canal thief by profession, but in selling his stolen wares at the palace, he saw me and carried me off, unknown to all.

His intentions," she flushed but her lovely eyes did not lower, "were not of the best."

I made bold to take her hands in mine.

Standing there, I realized that time, precious to me at this hour, was slipping. Before me stood the girl of my heart, but even more important to me was the welfare of my princess and her fateful bracelet. These I must attain at any cost, even the loss of my beloved.

"I must go," I said slowly. "It was the hand of fate that directed me to meet my destiny here. For you are my destiny. You must know that, ere I go." I smiled. "I should like to take your name with me, wachin."

"Thilna," she made answer, making no attempt to free her imprisoned hand. "Thilna of Jaray."

"And I am Darak, of Werg."

She nodded quickly, her eyes bright. "Yes. You are well-known, even in Jaray, Darak of Werg," she said quietly, and then the look in her eyes became urgent, supplicating. "You must return here with the dawn!"

"You ask me that?" I said slowly.

"Yes, for in the city the sun will only bring death upon you, and it will bring discovery of me, and no good to either of us. You will return, even though you find no trace of the Princess of Werg, or her bracelet."

I drew her to me then and kissed her full on the lips. A moment we thus stood, while the cry of a yammir rose full upon the night from the desert waste.

I released Thilna with a heart pang that it might be for the last time that I held her thus.

"I will return with the dawn," I promised, looking deep into her violet eyes. Then I turned, and without a word bounded up a companionway to the deck. There I stumbled over Deodum, and thinking that Thilna might perchance trip over him, I heaved him into the deep, chill waters of the Thasser.

I followed after, but Deodum and I went in opposite directions. you may be sure! I swiftly sped across the broad bosom of the Thasser toward the city, and having dragged myself from the canal stood there, dripping, ever cautious. There was no wharf, nothing but the dank mudflats.

Some three hundred feet up the slope, the city of Jarod commenced to come into being, and toward this I sped, following the direction in which the lambent needle pointed.

And the needle pointed toward the danger-ridden palace of the Empress of Mars!

CHAPTER III

Flight From Cammint

SKIRTING sidestreets, wending my way along through the dim underworld section, my path led me toward the royal palace.

What would be my entrance, what my method of

serving my princess, of escaping with her, of bringing to fruition my plans, I was, in all truth, not aware. Yet I knew that these things must be done, if the glory of Werg were not to be swept from the face of Mars.

Without plan, without disguise, I, a Wergite, recognizable as such in sufficient light, stalked through the demimonde of Jador. Chance alone it would be, I knew, that would present to me a workable plan. And so it was!

INTO my sight came as abandoned and bloodthirsty a scene as can be imagined! A dozen harrans there were, full decked in their finery, swords glinting dully, faces wild with the joy of combat, and standing them off were a mere four men, giant in build, savage and bearded of face. In swordplay and numbers they were illy matched, yet were going at it with a courage and audacity that was little short of heroic!

Not long did I watch, but leaped forward into the thickest of the battle, my lips curled. Well enough I knew the tactics of these harrans. Cruel, bloodthirsty, conscienceless devils with hearts of iron. Well enough I knew their sport, parading up and down the side-streets of Jador, for entertainment slaughtering needlessly all who stood in their way.

"Have at you then!" I cried, and threw myself into it with fervor. Now there were a dozen harrans against the five of us, but at that moment the odds turned. It was luck alone which enabled me to put the fear of their gods into them, those harrans, for in the first second of my entering, one of them succumbed to the bite of my blade, and, decapitated, lolled to the cobblestones in a pool of blood.

We pressed them, those four ruffians and I, and slaughtered them one by one. Blood lust rose up in me. Lunge, parry, lunge, counterpoint, feint—death!

Our feet scuffed the alley stones as we pressed them backward, though our breath was rasping. With the suddenness of thought, our assailants were cut down to one gasping, death-fearing harran, a colonel in the service to judge by the stars on his shoulder. But he asked no quarter, and would have expected none. With courage that was magnificent, his blade was like a web of sparkling light as it fended off our five blood-stained weapons.

He snarled as he fought, backed into a cul-de-sac. Now, abruptly, my companions in the fight stood back and left me to finish him off, but ere I could beat down his guard, a sudden thought came to me.

I redoubled my efforts on him, leaped in under his weapon, and with a final stroke struck it singing away into the night. Then I stepped forward, pressing my blade to his midriff. He dropped his arms, and stood rigid, face a mask.

Abruptly I faced the men at my back.

"Be gone with you!" I cried. "Here's my prisoner, my sport, and to what purpose I put him is no concern of yours.

As one man, they muttered "Aye," and melted away

into the foul night.

I TURNED back to my man, and pressed my weapon harder. "I have no desire to kill you," I snarled. "But suppose I spare you—what profit in it for me?"

He said stiffly, "On the other hand, what profit in the body of a dead man? What's the price of my life?"

I told him outright, and he looked at me sharply.

"Truly," he said angrily, "treachery to my Empress is too much to ask! Run me through, but I'll not let an assassin into the Royal Palace!"

"I promise you that no harm will come to the Empress Flavia," I told him patiently. "Nor shall I seek to destroy the palace. My sole intention is primarily to rescue the Princess of Werg, secondly to take back the Royal Hiniusian Bracelet."

I looked him square in the eyes, and finally he nodded. Harra or not, beast or not, there's honor in the soul of most men, and there was a promise in this man's eyes that would be kept.

I dropped my weapon, and explained my desires more fully.

He frowned in thought. "A small request, hoepx,*" he said carelessly. "I think the trick can be turned. I have a friend doing penal duty in the menial's wing. You'll remain here, and within the hour I'll return."

He disappeared without more ado into the noisome night. I sheathed my sword, and sank down upon the cobble-stones, exultation running strong in my veins. Victory in sight, the princess once more restored to her homeland, with luck!

I waited, shivering in the chill Martian night, drawing my jacket tighter around me.

Later, came quick military footsteps out of the hemming darkness. It was the colonel. Without a word, he commenced to disrobe, and I struggled into the gold braid and leather finery of his rare Uxillian silk habiliments. I clapped his fur broad-cap to my head, and stood to attention with gauntleted hand clasping the hilt of my jewel-shot sword. He nodded grimly.

"You'll pass, hoepx," he said grimly. "The casque rounds out your face somewhat, so that you may be assumed to be a Crillian." He stooped, began to strip from one of his dead comrades, accouterments somewhat spattered with blood. "A like enough story for me," he said musingly. "Struck down in an alley-way, after I had received the special permit; stripped and left naked. . . . The aeroplane you'll find ready to fly at Cammint Field. My credentials, my authorization for entrance to the Royal Palace, all there, in an inner pocket. But may you be shot down within the hour. I've performed my half of the bargain."

"May you continue to perform it, by saying nothing." With this final word, I strode off into the night.

* Hoepx—a ferocious animal with a long, sharp horn atop its head, which serves almost the same capacity as a sword in its manner of fighting. The Hoepx has been known to vanquish a master swordsman. Its movements are lightning swift.—*Fauna of Mars, Settlement Survey.*

WITH quickening pace, for the tiny moons of Mars were rising ever higher, swallowing the night, I went forth on Jharath Way, with the bright light of street-glows lighting my Wergite features all too strongly.

About me swarmed the higher classes of Crillians. No woman, for such would be dangerous; but men, great, full-chested giants, with jet black hair, swinging easily along, saw-tooth capes billowing out behind them, fine, jewel-encrusted swords clanking at their booted hips. And men with the stripes of the Royal Guards, and the Royal City Guards, as well as harrans from the polar wastes and outlying districts.

Through all this I wended my way, feeling that the eyes of every harra who passed were fastened upon me in suspicion. Truly I, Darak of Werg, was in a hornet's nest.

I had all but reached my destination, and was crossing the square into the quieter section of the town opposite the beginnings of Upper Jador, the palace of the Empress rising into sight a scant five miles distant, Cammint Field across the block, when a hearty voice bellowed, in the Crillian tongue.

"Viel, by the gods!" and a heavy hand clapped me on the shoulder. For the moment my blood froze, and almost I was of a mind to whip out my blade and have at the man on the spot. But that were folly, indeed, so that I turned, and beheld the fierce eyes of a 'brother' colonel.

The hearty look on his bearded face fell away, and he blinked in confusion.

"Your pardon," he muttered, surveying me narrowly. "Almost I could swear that no other harra in the service wears such a cocky, ice-white ostrich plume in his casque as Viel. But no matter!" He laughed. "A silly mistake!" A final clap to the shoulder and he was off, albeit turning his head back puzzledly.

A narrow escape, if escape it was, and the blood was again tingling in my veins. Pray God that harra's suspicions did not remain, else I were dead in all truth.

But no time for useless fears! I quickened my step across the square, swung through the portals of Cammint Field past the gateman, who thought my uniform voucher enough for my right to enter. I went straight across the field, across the red-grassed tarmac.

There was a sleepy mechanic in a booth. I hailed him angrily.

"You've attended to my bee-wing,* rogue?" I shouted menacingly. He scrambled to his feet, a lanky lad, anxious to please a man with stars on his shoulder.

He beckoned and crossed the field toward a bee-wing, I following.

In a moment I was in possession of the craft, and

* The bee-wing is the airplane of Mars. It is an ancient invention, and the only fuel possible for its operation is radium, rapidly becoming the scarcest of Martian elements. Therefore, the bee-wing is a highly prized possession of any Martian.—*Thompson's Sociology of the Martian Nations.*

no hand to stay me. I leaped aboard, stood before the control panel, and worked the levers. The elliptical wings of my craft began to beat the air rapidly, until they were a blur to my sight; until they made such deep, roaring buzz that sound of the outside world was gone entirely.

Ecstasiantly, I strained my eyes out over Cammint. Empty, no staying hand! Good enough! But wait, what was that?

FAR across at the entrance, a harran officer came running through, waving his arms.

The game was up? No, by God! and I rammed home the final plunger, and the bee-wing took off flapping up into the thin air and forward with such speed that in a matter of seconds Cammint was a dot of light in the darkness, and the city of Jador was sprawled in fantastic shadows below.

I went blind, without lights, never knowing when some similar craft might blunder out of the encircling darkness full tilt into me.

I set my course for the Royal Palace, and had my forward needle guns set for any who dared offer me hindrance.

The palace loomed out of the starry night like a gaunt finger pointing out my doom, and I drove for it, speculating on my destiny. Did death for me and my princess lie there, or were the gods of my fathers to give me carte blanche to walk through all the monstrous dangers ahead unscathed?

Tight-lipped, I muttered, "For my princess, and all else must be forgot!" Yet, I persisted in forgetting my princess, whom I had never seen face to face. The face of Thilna, that delicate, serene, divinely lovely face of the girl in the houseboat on the Thasser, rose insistently before my mind's eye. Would I ever see her again, hear her low, thrilling voice? Pray the Gods I did! For I had spent such short, swift-slipping moments with her—I, who hoped with the devil's own optimism to spend the rest of my days in the sunshine of her smile.

The Royal Landing Stage, on the palace roof! My hand steady on the helm, yet trembling withal, I dropped the bee-wing, brought the craft to rest on the composition roof. The wings flapped down to a nothingness of motion. With huge bravado, but unease in my heart, I dropped to the roof, and stood waiting.

CHAPTER IV

Paran Leeah

THREE harrans came striding toward me, faces grim, gauntleted hands to sword. Two were merely bokkas, without rating; the other, to judge by the gold and bronze of his caparison, was a captain in the service. But scant respect did I, in my disguise as a superior officer, expect from the captain, for in one regiment even a bokka owes neither fealty

nor obedience to any officer in another.

"Your business?" rasped out the harran captain without preliminaries. "Quick about it!"

"Too much mouth and too little ear is often a guarantor of a short life," I responded coldly, striding up to him. "I come from Cammint, with a special permit and order from Lieutenant-General Groton Loj of the Ruiri battalions. My regiment is leaving for the Hahillian front tomorrow—forced march, you understand, and I have a debt which I must extract from a—friend." I put a wry significance on the last words.

I could see him relenting, but he held out an imperious hand for the permit and my credentials. He scanned them sharply, handed them back, and then motioned the two bokkas forward. Quite impersonally, they divested me of my jeweled sword and of my other weapon, a single dirk. And I, weaponless in the midst of peril, could do little more than comply with grace.

"You'll claim those when you return," the captain growled. "And as for your friend, a poor class of friend he is, and a long descent you'll make reaching him, doing detail work—in the servant's wing!" He laughed harshly. "Get along, then!"

No need of a further invitation! I made for the sky-ramp. At the farther end I saw a staircase and made for it.

Still feeling deeply the loss of my weapons, I descended, emerged into another corridor, unused, apparently, save as a guardroom. The laughter of a dozen lounging harrans greeted me.

"Peacock!" jeered one, no doubt taking cognizance of the ostrich plume projecting upward from my casque. I paused, loathe to engage in combat at this time, yet resenting the jeer to the full. A repetition of the taunt, and a round of hoarse laughter decided me.

I wheeled to the harran who had spoken, a slim fellow with malicious deviltry in his eye. "It's safe to open your mouth against a man who's lost his weapons. Is that your class of bravery?" I cried furiously. "Had I my sword, I'd stuff your words back into your throat with its point!"

THE harran I addressed leaped to his feet without more ado, uttering an oath fraught with insult. From one of his companions he borrowed a sword, and extended it to me by the blade; I grasped it, and without parley we were engaged.

In a trice, a space was cleared about us, and we went at it thick and heavy. No need to tell you more of that battle, save that the man was certainly no master of the sword. Tricks he had, but a blundering application of them that rendered useless his onslaught. I was scarce breathing hard, when he fell at my feet, inert.

I faced the others in silence, but none offered taunt or hand against me. I returned the borrowed sword, and then, without a moment's hesitation unbuckled

from my fallen adversary's waist his glittering scabbard. I retrieved his sword, and in a moment's time was equipped once more with the weapons I so sorely needed.

So I swung down the staircase from that corridor, and continuously downward, running softly, wary of passing harrans.

Never had I seen anything to compare with this fabulously adorned palace. In all the universe, there is nothing to compare with the wealth of jewel-set bas-reliefs, the inhumanly carved statuettes that range the walls, the rich tapestries, the solid gold and bronze staircases. But admiration for those beauties? No! Rather, a hot burning anger against the inhumane Empress of Crill, who had wrested from her many subjugated nations their traditional treasures, and an unbearable annual tribute to boot.

And now, thirteen levels below, the lambent needle pointed out my direction—straight ahead! Here on this very level was my beloved Princess, if I had interpreted facts aright.

At that I stopped dead. Ah, would they dare strip from her wrist that fabulous bracelet? Would they dare humiliate her as they had humiliated other royalty?

With an oath at these possibilities, I nonetheless determined that my path lay forward. And thus it was.

I crept down the lushly carpeted corridor, keeping in the half-shadows. Far down at the end of that corridor a light was burning, and there was one lone guard who patrolled with languid, disinterested step up and down before a heavily carved bronze door.

My best course of action, it seemed, was openhandedness, and thus with a bravado which is a misleading index to my bravery, since my heart thumped so that I waited for its bursting, I strode past that guard—almost, that is. Then, a quick glance up and down the corridor, and the scrape of good steel on gold as I drew my weapon. Our swords clanged twice—one fruitless lunge, a parry; and a final lunge which sent the harran to the cruel gods of his ancestors.

Quickly then, I gathered him in my arms, and dumped him without ceremony into the capacious interior of a gloriously inlaid vase.

THEN, for a moment, I patrolled up and down in front of the door, uneasy, distrustful my incredible luck. Miraculous, that I had descended this far, was so near my goal, yet so short of it! What lay beyond that door? The princess? Or—death!

In a fury of impatience, I put my hand to the knob. It turned, and I pushed the door open a crack. Darkness inside, save for a shimmering effulgence of light such as a woman—the Princess?—might keep burning in her sleep.

Another foot I pushed wide the door, so that I might slip through. I closed it behind me, and to my ears came the sound of soft breathing. Back against the door, hand to my sword, I melted into the silence. Danger here? Guards perhaps?

My eyes fitted themselves to the gloom and I saw a large chamber, thick-carpeted, flanked with exotically designed tapestries, simply furnished with silver mirror and toilettries—and a broad couch of darkest parwood, curtained against the impurities of the night air with light purple gauzes.

And it was none other than the Empress of Mars who lay there, immersed in slumber, her beauteous, dark-skinned features as innocent-seeming as a child's.

And the lambent needle of my compass pointed with unswerving steadiness toward that couch!

Almost I burst out with a groan. Where now to find the Princess of Werg?

Useless thoughts to plague me in this dangerous moment! I crossed the room, looked upon the perfect features. My hand tightened on my sword hilt, and slowly I withdrew it.

Assassination? Before the gods, I knew I could never play a part in such an act. Were she to rear up, dagger in hand, face contorted with her innate cruelty, and lunge at me in death passion, I could have struck, and thus in part have ridded my planet of her decadent influence. But murder a woman, or even a man, in sleep? Not I!

But the bracelet? For that I would go through fire.

Very quietly I withdrew the arm of the Empress from beneath the silken coverlet, and my breath caught in my throat as I thus revealed to my sight the Royal Hinusian Bracelet. Softly I withdrew it. In my palm I lay it, and seemingly there was a pool of light in my hand. A changing, shifting wonder of sparkles and prismatic brilliances, that well-nigh hid the deepest shadows in the room. I gazed with fascination at the ancient, precious liazzes * set into the texture of a subtly wrought metal weave, for never had I beheld the Bracelet this close.

I deposited it quickly in the pocket of my skin-like inner garment, and in the same moment the Empress moaned and tossed in her sleep. Abruptly her eyes opened, and in the same moment I saw consciousness, full, sharp, enter them.

YET, with the miraculous poise and control of true royalty, she made no slightest motion, save that her face was swept with rage.

"What do you here, harran?" she whispered tensely.

"Quiet!" I hissed, and presented the point of my blade to the whiteness of her throat. "Else the land of Crill may lose its Empress!"

* Liazzes—precious stones, peculiar to Mars. They have magnetic properties, which seem to have some connection with the Magnetic Poles of Mars, reacting to them to throw off rays whose range lies somewhere near the cosmic range, considered of great benefit to health. Observations have proven the truth of this contention, and it is to be regretted that they are so scarce. The existing jewels are set into the Famous Hinusian Bracelet, emblem of royalty of Werg, situated at the North Magnetic pole. It is the custom for the Empress, or the Princess of Werg to wear the bracelet, for the beneficial effect to her health, and therefore to the future ruler of the nation. Its national importance far surpasses that of any earthly crown.—*Thompson's Sociology of the Martian Nations.*

Poised thus, thinking out some means of wresting from her my princess' location, I must have missed the sigh of the opening door.

"You'll drop your weapon, Wergite," said a soft, gentle voice with unmistakable meaning.

Resist? That were folly, if, as I suspected, the man held a weapon which could act devastatingly over a distance of twenty sword-lengths. With blind anger gripping me, I nonetheless turned and faced my captor.

He was not of great stature, nor yet of great strength, from his looks, yet here, I knew, stood a man of vast will and moral strength. No Crillian this, with hard round face and hook nose, but a man of some far country, to judge by the even lean cut of countenance. I was struck by his pale hazel eyes, and the sheen of skin stretched tight over his cheekbones, so that a magnetic aura of living force seemed to leap out at me. And it was that feeling of vast will in his eyes that made me sheath my sword, and not the threat of that fabulously scarce weapon in his hand whose lower-order rays can incinerate a man at twenty sword-lengths.

The Empress came upright on her couch, shielding her naked body with a silken coverlet. Her voice lashed out, "Well, Paron Leeah, why is it that you wait? You saw his intentions, to loot me of my bracelet, to murder me in my sleep! Have done with him!"

"Your bracelet, Flavia?" His brows went up as he eyed her through the gloom. He slowly shook his head, and his voice deepened tensely. "By the gods, Flavia, what is this empire lust that runs so strongly through your body? You've desecrated half of Mars, subjugated a dozen nations and a hundred free cities. Still not content with these riches, you must snatch from within her country's borders the Princess of Werg and that bracelet which is so useless in Crill!"

She half spat at him in her ire. "Truly, Prince Consort though you be, Paron Leeah, you go too far. I'll have your head for this, if you persist!"

"You'd sign my death warrant tonight," he said, with half-contempt, "and by the morning you'd be begging my forgiveness with lips of love."

His eyes softened on her as she sank back on her couch, speechless, eyes blazing.

"Cruel, cruel," he said, shaking his finely molded head, and he sighed. "And now I have news for you that will not sit well on your ears. You've been humiliating the Princess of Werg by allotting her menial tasks in the servants' wing, and now you've paid for your folly."

HER eyes widened. "Gone, then?"

"Gone," said the gently voiced Prince. "How I do not know, save that tradesmen are daily admitted through the postern of the palace at the rear. Ere this, servant girls have thus been taken by lustful hucksters."

As he spoke, a slow flush of disdain crept over her face. "What care I that she has gone then?" she cried.

"I had no desire other than to humble her and her royal family, to demonstrate how pitifully short a time it shall be ere Werg is subjugated, enslaved even as was its princess."

"Subjugate Werg, whose invulnerable fortresses are nature itself?" He shook his head, as his eyes swung back to me. "An impossible task, my Flavia. And now, Wergite," and there was strange fire in his voice, "you will come with me."

I was baffled, trying to fathom his purpose. But nothing loath, expecting anything from death to outright freedom, I moved toward the door, still under the compulsion of his flame pistol.

The Empress, she who owned one-half of Mars, and was bent on owning the other, flung herself in front of him "My bracelet!" she panted pleadingly. "Paron Leeah!"

He brushed past her, this little man. "A mere bauble in Crill," he said without inflection, "but life itself in Werg!"

And the door closed on the Empress Flavia, into whose eyes I had seen leap a fury indescribable.

"For the moment I am your ally," Paron Leeah murmured as we moved down the corridor, and came to the staircase. "But remember you are also my prisoner. Continue down the stairs, and move swiftly!"

A fantastic, meaningless situation! I could hold no hope and yet no fear.

But we moved swiftly, well-enough, down through level after level, for it was apparent that Paron Leeah, who surely seemed all-powerful, was in fear of some danger from behind.

Thus we reached ground level, past guards standing like death-laden shadows about this vast hall, turned right and trod a long, chill, lightless corridor, when behind us I heard the march of swift harran feet!

CHAPTER V

The Lock Beneath the Thasser

"CONTINUE at even pace," said Paron Leeah.

Abruptly the harrans came through into the corridor behind us, and the figure of a captain of the guards stepped in front of us. True to Paron Leeah's instructions, I continued to move forward, and consequently the Captain of the Guards was forced to move backward, though his sword was out.

"Excellency," he said stiffly, "in the name of the Empress Flavia, I require you to give yourself into my care!"

"What is it you wish, then?" inquired Paron Leeah, regally, as if he had not heard aright.

"Her majesty requests your arrest, excellency!"

"Very well," said Paron Leeah agreeably, never once instructing me to cease my stride.

"I command you to stop, excellency!" said the desperate harran, sweat beading his face. "You and your

prisoner are to be taken in arrest immediately, else I lose my head!"

Furiously he flung up his sword, presenting its point to my stomach. "You shall lose it anyway," I snarled, as I was forced to a stop. I felt the flame pistol of Paran Leeah taken from my back, and his gentle voice murmured, "Wergite, prove your sword-arm!"

Joyously I leaped back, whipped out my blade, and with a single motion swept the harran's away. His face puckered with a frightful rage. "Have at you, then!" he roared, and flung himself upon me.

Behind me I felt a terrific burst of heat. A wave of some fetid, noisome odor was borne to my nostrils. But so busy was I with my skilled adversary that not till many moments later did I realize that Paran Leeah flame pistol had sent eight good and true harrans to the understanding hands of their ancestors.

I was too busy with my man, for I quickly saw that he had earned his station. He had a lightning like lunge and parry that had me fighting like mad, and filled this narrow corridor with silver thunder.

He drove me back at first, his face hideous with triumph.

"Die!" he cried, lunging, but I brought my blade down across his with such force that I like to splinter them both.

"Die yourself, harran!" I panted, and pressed him back and back until he was braced against a heavily barred door, fighting for his head, which doubtless the Empress would have taken later anyway—so that I felt no compunction when I struck his blade up and away, stepped under it, and pierced him through to the heart.

Ere I had a chance to gain my breath, Paran Leeah had rolled the bloody figure away from the door and was working a series of tumblers. The heavy, metal door swung away and Paran Leeah motioned me through.

I put foot to the first of a flight of steps, the unmistakable odor of the dungeon drifting into my nostrils. I turned sharply, to meet the eyes of the Prince Consort. He looked me straight in the eye, then placed the flame pistol back in its holster. He stepped through after me, pulling the door close. I heard it click tight.

He took my arm then, for there was naught save darkness here, and thus led me forward, on a path which took us past cells filled with the whimpering and pleadings and idiocies of a hundred outraged felons.

FINALLY we stopped as I felt the hand of Paran Leeah drop to my shoulder. There was a soft laugh in his voice. "Whatever inimical thoughts you have of me, Wergite, dispel them at once. For now we are fugitives from the same power, fighting together, shoulder to shoulder. Agreed?"

"Agreed!" I cried, for there was something inexpressibly noble and courageous about this little,

strong-willed man. "But why should you, Prince Consort to the Empress Flavia, flee from her?"

"Because," he said somberly, "I am as much a prisoner in Jador as are those wretches in the dungeons behind us." He was quiet for the moment. Then I heard him working at the damp wall before us. I heard rotten brick and mortar fall, then, after a moment a grating sound, as of a door swinging wide. A wave of rotten, cold air rushed at me. . . .

"A forgotten passageway," murmured Paran Leeah, "of which none save myself know." His tone turned bitter. "But come, my friend, we must away. Follow the walls of the tunnel," and desperate for haste myself, I turned on my heel and plunged swiftly forward into the damp blackness of that tunnel, the tunnel door swinging shut behind.

And as we moved forward Paran Leeah briefly told me his story, one that was eloquently bound up with the turbulent events on Mars of the last few years.

Five Martian years ago, Crill had been but a single large country, existing in peace with all other nations. When the Empress Flavia came into power, however, the peace treaties were thrown overboard, and Crill began an active assault on those helpless, unprepared countries on her flanks. Scarce three years had passed ere Crill became a vast empire, embracing within its borders a dozen nations and a hundred small principalities, and was raging avidly for yet more territory.

These wars of aggression soon claimed Hioppi, a country of which Paran Leeah was king. It had been a bloodless conquest, for Hioppi was ever a peaceful nation; and when Paran Leeah had been presented at the court of the Empress Flavia, she had evidently been so impressed with his quiet, godlike mien, that she had commanded marriage, her excuse being that she wished to consolidate relations between the two countries.

"I married her," Paran Leeah said bitterly, "with the hope of being able to influence her toward peace, but little I knew how tender, how pathetic, how utterly feminine she could be, at times. Falling in love with her has been my worse sin, and one for which I'll doubtless pay with many moments of heartbreak.

"When I found that I could not influence her to give back to her plundered nations their freedom, I knew that I must return to my homeland, to array my people for battle. But that were sooner said than done! For I found that I was a prisoner, under open arrest, unable, hardly, to leave the palace, and definitely not the city. Were I a man of might—one who could wield a sword with effect, I would long since have used this tunnel. . . . There is a step here, Darak of Werg."

We pressed forward, I still at a loss to name our destination.

"And for what reason did you choose the moment of my entrance into the palace for escape?"

He laughed. "My intentions were hardly thought out. Suffice to say, that I am of some official importance in the Royal Palace. Thus, almost in the same

moment that I was informed of the abduction of the Princess of Werg, the roof guard was also informing me that news had come from Cammint of a Wergite, who, through some duplicity, had gained entrance to the palace.

"My first thought," he acknowledged, "was for my wife, Flavia. And as for choosing that moment, Darak of Werg, it was because, for the first time since my stay here, I found a sword-arm that would willingly back me up in my fight for the border. I have a flame pistol, true, but it is not much good. One charge remains in it now, and I have determined to save that until it will do the most good. It is a long trail to Hioppi. It was a lucky thing which brought you to Crill, else I had made the attempt alone, finally—which, I make no doubt, would have ended with my return to the palace, or at the least, would have spitted me on the end of some harran's sword."

A strange tale, this! I now saw myself with a double purpose—to rescue my princess, an impossible-seeming task, and to conduct Hioppi's king to the border safely.

As we moved forward, I recollected my promise to the wondrous girl in the houseboat on the Thasser. Despair welled up in my heart. I'd promised to return ere dawn broke, and it must be that now the Sun was making ready to struggle up out of his ancient bed. Would she wait for me, even though I failed in my promise?

With such thoughts to plague me, we again came to a door, at the end of the dank tunnel. I paused, not knowing where it led, but Paran Leeah bade me help turn a long heavy bar. Thus, with him pulling down, and I pushing up, a grinding of rust-filled threads heralded the opening of the door, or valve, rather.

"It has not been opened these past thousand years," said Paran Leeah. "I have traversed as far as this valve, but my strength has not been great enough to open it. Doubtless it was once intended for escape by some remote ancestors of Flavia. At any rate," he added, as we fastened the valve behind us, "we shall have a good dousing in the Thasser!"

"The Thasser!" I echoed in amazement.

For answer he pulled on my arm, and we came to the blank, damp, absolute end of the tunnel. He bade me reach upward, and my fingers closed on a huge wheel. It was set into the side of the tunnel, and doubtless operated a trap-door above us, which, when opened, would let in the cold waters of the Thasser.

Our first certainty that the Thasser was actually above us came abruptly, as the wheel turned. A stream of water fairly drenched Paran Leeah, but his only exclamation was one of intense satisfaction. As we turned the wheel, with the air growing damper and chillier by the second, the stream of water grew in size, driven down by immense pressure, to judge by its solid, thought-destroying roar.

The water first lapped at our ankles, gained our

knees, inexorably crowded up around our hips. We stood shoulder to shoulder, wondering if, perchance, we were to die like rats in a trap. I took the opportunity of divesting myself of my harran's finery, for its weight would not help me in the waters. When I'd finished, my only caparison was my sword belt and sword, a tough skin jacket and breech clout.

Paran Leeah gripped my arm. The waters of the Thasser now swirled beneath our arm pits. Again we worked over the wheel, until the fall of water became an intolerable pounding shattering against my ear drums. The waters surged up past my chin, so that I had to look upward in order to breathe.

I felt the wheel strain under my hands, realized that Paran Leeah was already under water, and signaling that we open the trap above us to its widest. I put my strength against it once more. It gave, and from the sound I was certain that the entire Thasser had forced its way in upon us.

In a rush the rising level overwhelmed me, and I scarce had time to draw a breath ere I was completely immersed, indeed half drowning. For a moment I reached out for Paran Leeah, vainly!

I let go the wheel, and shot upward, my fingers clawing for the opening. It resisted my frantic search, and sightless, drowning, holding my breath was a monstrous torture. And through my brain lanced the thought of Paran Leeah! Had he escaped?

NO time for those thoughts, if I were not to die at this moment. I need not tell you how sheerly wonderful it was to grip the edge of that circular aperture, to shoot myself upward with every ounce of my dying strength.

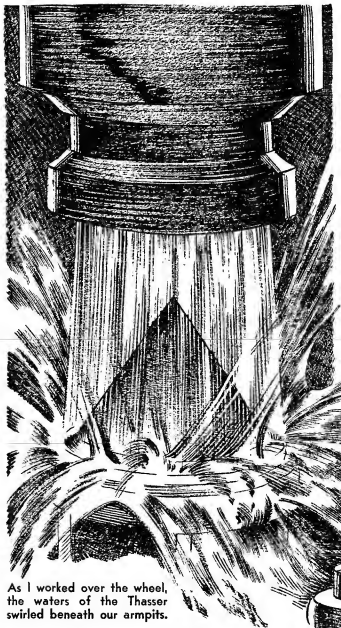
What blessed relief it was when I broke through to the surface of the Thasser, gasping, eyes bulging, throat constricted! In another second my lungs would have burst, and that had been the end of Darak of Werg.

I opened my eyes, and flung away the hair matted wetly across my face.

"Paran Leeah!" I called tensely. No answer! I looked wildly about me, but—for this I thank my gods—the Sun had not yet risen and the Thasser fog was on the water. Nowhere was Paran Leeah, and in desperation I made ready to dive, a foolish thought, for already the waters of the Thasser had borne me far downstream.

Snobbing in my anger at having lost my benefactor and friend, I tried to fight upstream. Small use! In remorse, I abandoned myself to the insistence of the current, meantime taking note of my surroundings. Little though I knew of the Thasser, or indeed of Jador, still I knew that I was above that point at which the houseboat of the hapless Deodum had been anchored, where I had met the girl of my heart such short, eventful hours before.

I waited with bated breath, scanning each pier sharply as it slipped back and away. All manner of sound, strange, muted, distant, entered my ears. The



As I worked over the wheel, the waters of the Thasser swirled beneath our armpits.

gnawing scream of the double-headed wharf-rats, the cry of the hochin in the monstrous city whose towers and battlements loomed far up as ghostly shadows; the plash of some aquatic serpent rearing up out of the waters. And suddenly into sight came the pier opposite which Deodum's houseboat should be—but was not!

Now indeed, did I feel as if life were of no more moment, and in numb despair I drifted. I had failed to locate the Princess of Werg, had lost Thilna and Paran Leeah. Almost I abandoned myself to the freezing coldness of the Thasser. But then a flare of hope shook me. The houseboat, in common with others having no means of working its way upstream, must then have drifted downstream!

With this thought, I set my frozen body in motion, propelling myself through the waters with the slim hope that I could catch up with the craft, which surely must merely be drifting with the current.

After some time, during which the darkness had

lightened almost imperceptibly, I saw a shadowy hulk form in the distance.

With joy, I redoubled my efforts, my sword, which I had dared not discard, dragging at me. The shadow grew, showing itself without doubt to be a houseboat, but whether it were that of Deodum or not I did not know.

I gained the gunwale, drew myself dripping to the deck. Thoroughly exhausted, I flung myself to the flooring, lay there panting. The warmth of life began to flow back into my body.

Abruptly, something hurled itself upon me. In a moment, I turned into a raging demon, fending off the creature, but I was too weak for combat. Something descended on my skull. The whole universe cracked, and consciousness faded away.

CHAPTER VI

Screams In The Night

WHEN I came to my senses, I was lying on a hard bench, the mournful lapping of the Thasser in my ears. As I opened my eyes I thought surely that I had ascended into the heaven



of my fathers, for it was no less than the face of an angel into which I looked.

The anxiety disappeared from her lovely eyes, and she smiled. "It must be a strong blow, I see, that could take the life of Darak of Werg!" she exclaimed. "But Paran Leeah—"

"Paran Leeah!" I muttered, struggling to my feet, and taking her hands in mine. "He escaped then!" Comprehension coursed through my mind simultaneous with a blinding pain through my head. Paran Leeah, of course, had thought me dead, and had thought me an intruder in the mist. He had drifted, even as I, had struggled aboard the houseboat, and convinced Thilna of his friendliness.

Then, without hindrance, I tenderly took her in my arms and kissed her—I, who had thought never to see her again. "I like to have died a thousand deaths in my fear of losing you," I said huskily. "Every moment since then my thoughts have not been of the Princess of Werg, but of you, and always you!"

She smiled roguishly. "Does my warrior wear his heart upon his sleeve, that a mere maid of Jaray should steal it in a momentary meeting?"

"Momentary?" I cried, clasping her slim shoulders and holding her off at arm's length. "Know you that that moment was as a thousand years, and all too short at that!"

Gently, she placed a finger to my lips. "And thus it was with me," she said lowly, and placed her lips tenderly on mine. "And thus we plight our troth!" I caught her slim body once again in my arms, nor yet did I ever wish to let go.

A moment later, perhaps circumspectly, Paran Leeah descended to the cabin from the port companionway. He stood looking at me wryly.

"Truly, Darak of Werg," he exclaimed, "it were well I did not see fit to use the one remaining charge in my flame pistol on the intruder who boarded us last night."

Laughing, I forgave him, and was about to turn back to my beloved, when a chilling voice rang in our ears:

"Ho! Houseboat! To anchor, and make ready for inspection, upon order of Her Imperial Majesty, the Empress Flavia of Mars!"

WE looked at each other askance. Then, as one man, Paran Leeah and I ran up the starboard companionway, and peered out the small window of the door. Idling alongside our quarter beam, through the yellow waters of the Sunlit Thasser, I saw a low, red official cutter, manned by a dozen harrans gazing toward our craft.

It was daytime now, though the sun, a glorious blazing object, would set shortly. The blow Paran Leeah had dealt had rendered me unconscious for many hours, and during those hours, the houseboat must have drifted many tens of lothala* down the

Thasser. Evidently, a general alarm for Paran Leeah and myself had gone out, and the soldiery was scouring the nation for us.

I grasped Paran Leeah's arm, and we quietly descended the companionway.

"Our best plan," I told Thilna and him, "is to say nothing at present." To Thilna I said, "You can swim?" She nodded briefly.

Urging them ahead of me, we ascended the port companionway, to the upper deck, and stood there huddled in the lee of the stern cabin. I looked around the corner of the cabin, saw the trim stern of the radium-powered cutter just as it edged past our quarter beam and ground against us amidships.

"Quickly!" I exclaimed, and motioned the two of them into the water. Puzzledly, but without questioning me, they obeyed, and Thilna lithely let herself over the gunwale, Paran Leeah following after.

In accordance with my instructions, they sank beneath the waters, Thilna throwing a smilingly reproachful look at me as the current bore her away.

At the same moment, came the grate of harran boots on the deck of the houseboat as they boarded it. My short sword still at my hip, I also let myself over the gunwale, just as a group of harrans came into view around the forward cabin.

I worked my way along in the shadow of the slanting hull until I was under the stern. The red cutter, a powerful craft, was now visible, manned, as I knew it would be, by a single harran at the tiller.

Swiftly, out of sight now, I worked my way, almost submerged, between the two craft, dragging at my sword meanwhile. The harrans had bound the two boats together with a bow line, a thick length of tough yamp. I could just see the helmsman, a lanky bearded fellow of great strength, sitting idly in the stern, waiting for his fellows to complete their inspection of this apparently tenantless craft.

I drew my sword, and with a single, short motion severed the connecting rope.

In the same moment I forced the two craft apart, I drew myself swiftly aboard the cutter.

AT once, as if he had been intuitively warned of my coming, I was leaped upon by the single harran. Indeed, so surprising was his onslaught that I was forced to one knee as I fought. And it were truly death then had I not, in pure accident, lunged against the cutter's port gunwale, causing the craft to list.

My assailant lost his balance scarce long enough to enable me to gain a secure footing, so that he drove me backward until I had the feel of his style. In a trice I had driven him astern, the while he fought with a ferocity that was magnificent. He fought hard, fiercely, and well, and snarling with rage, again forced me back.

As might be expected, the harrans stranded aboard the houseboat soon gathered amidships, yelling encouragement to their fellow, at a loss for a course of action. Most Crillans are averse to water, for some

* Lothala—a distance equal to one-eighth of an Earth mile.

reason, so that it was not until the tide of battle had swung my way that a few of them thought to plunge into the waters to my adversary's rescue.

Then indeed, I saw that I must haste. Should another harran board the cutter, I were dead in all truth.

"Die!" I shouted, and lunged forward. For a moment our blades sparkled in the westerling Sun with prismatic brilliance, the face of my man a horrible thing to see, so full of rage was it. I pressed him back, mindful of the necessity of his death. A single lunge, and my blade came away running with good Martian blood. My man uttered a despairing shriek, and plunged overboard into the freezing waters of the Thasser.

One of the harrans in the water had reached the cutter, and was striving to lift himself into the vessel. With grim humor, I ground the heel of my naked foot down on his fingers. With a howl of anguish, he let go.

Exultantly, with a final taunting laugh at the stranded harrans, I sat down in the stern and pressed the starter of the radium motor. No noise at all, here, but immediately the powerful craft began to put on speed, until the fateful houseboat of dead Deodum was far astern.

Then I shouted out loud the names of Thilna and Paran Leeah. My heart almost filled to bursting when I heard a faint shout dead ahead. A few moments later, I held the cold body of my loved one clasped firm in my arms, and Paran Leeah was wringing the last ounce of power from the motor. We were cutting the waters of the Thasser swiftly, bound for Werg.

And now for the first time, I had an opportunity to talk with Thilna. She told me that sometime after I had left her, the docks had begun literally to swarm with harrans, and fearful that one would attempt to board the houseboat, she had, with some difficulty, to be sure, raised anchor, set the rudder, and drifted downstream, hoping I'd follow after. As Paran Leeah had boarded the cutter, she told me, she had almost pushed him back, until accident made him mention my name.

As we spoke, I noticed a peculiar expression on her face.

"Something is worrying you, Thilna?" I inquired. "There is scant need for it, you know. For three score lothala there is no human habitation."

"And after the three score lothala?" she queried, smiling.

I shrugged. "We shall have to abandon the cutter," I admitted. "For it is unlikely that we shall be allowed to use the Potah Locks, where the Thasser must needs drop to a lower level."

SHE dropped her eyes, frowning. Then she lifted them again. "I hope you will be able to forgive me," she said soberly.

"Forgive you?" I demanded. "And pray tell, for what? You speak in riddles, my sweet little one."

But at that moment, she had no chance to make answer. The Sun had long since descended into his ancient bed, and fog was again drifting over the Thasser. In the last two hours, at varying intervals, barges, propelled upstream by slaves laboriously turning huge wheels, had been passing us.

Thus far, we had no difficulty. Our best move had been to act quite naturally, and openly handedly stand upright and salute the barge men. True, we possessed an official craft, propelled by one of the few radium motors on Mars, but, if given reason, most persons will assume much, and these that we saw assumed us to be in legal possession, since we certainly betrayed no appearance of any guilt.

Now I saw one of these barges plowing upstream toward us, a frightfully lengthy craft, as long as the canal was broad. Too well I knew how such a craft could block us if it so wished. If harrans were perchance aboard, I knew that peril certainly threatened us.

Now my worst fears were realized.

For, seen through fog of night as a long black shadow, the barge was hastily swinging about, presenting her quarter to us, and in a few moments more, our passage would be blocked completely. There were harrans aboard, for a fact!

Paran Leeah desperately played with the radium motor, but already the shaft was spinning at maximum. With a groan I saw that we'd not make it.

The thin air rushed with frightful force past our ears. That shadow in the fog grew. Paran Leeah was now heading the cutter inshore, toward the single, slim passageway that remained. Almost, by a hair's breadth, we made it in safety, but then the barge filled the gap. Paran Leeah swung the tiller, and I like to have gone overboard under the force of our swerve. Straight for shore, at headlong velocity, we went, and the cutter hit the mudflats with such speed that it flung itself entirely clear of the Thasser before it stopped.

With Thilna in my arms, I literally leaped from the cutter, and fled into the night on the heels of Paran Leeah.

A score of savage voices rang out behind us, exhorting us to stop.

I set Thilna to her feet, and, her cheeks flushed with excitement, she ran like the wind beside me. Soon we had lost ourselves in the canal mists, beating our way across strange, soggy lands, known neither to me nor to my comrades.

We heard no sounds of pursuit, and felt justified in stopping to take council.

"And now," said Paran Leeah in his gentle voice, "where go we now? The Wergite border is certainly no more than three score lothala distant, which distance we cannot make in the night that remains."

Abruptly I tensed, blood racing in my veins. Out of the near distance, out of the night, came a scream to make the blood run cold. And again it came, a horrid, loathsome, bloodcurdling cacaphony beating

nauseously out of the night.

"Jerais!"* exclaimed Thilna and Paran Leeah, all in the same breath.

As one, we ran toward the creatures who thus filled the air with their hideous cries.

CHAPTER VII

Pursuit and Death

ABRUPTLY we came to a high wooden fence. It was not constructed to keep marauders out, but to keep jerais within.

With a single whispered word of reassurance, I climbed the fence, and disappeared from the sight of my companions. I dropped quietly to the hard packed ground, the shrieks of the otherwise gentle beasts filling the night.

I made a series of low, clicking sounds, almost a moan, and with elation I saw one of the tenuous-seeming beasts moving out of the fog toward me. It rubbed against me, its marvelously long, silken hair standing out from its transparent body as if, for all the world, it were immersed in some clear-water lake.

I gathered three of the triple-legged beasts about me, and made off toward the corral gate, congratulating myself on my luck. Valuable animals, these, and this was apparently the royal breeding grounds, on which we had inadvertently stumbled.

I quickened my stride, and thus had the ill-luck to stumble upon a feeding trough—a thin, metal affair which toppled with a fearful clanging.

I broke into a run, but ere I reached the gate, driving my beasts before me, a torch flared out wildly, illuminating me in its glare.

A cry of many voices, a clamor, broke out on the night, and now, fearing again for safety, I flung open the gate, and with fumbling fingers, swung it wide. In the royal look I had behind me, I saw harrans! True, the single breeding grounds, guarded against rascals by soldiery!

"**PARAN LEEAH!**" I shouted, and was rewarded with a quiet voice in my ear. Good! The jerais, intelligent animals, sat down when they saw what was wanted. I threw Thilna to the back of one, she being well-nigh buried in the airtight fluff of hair. The pound of harran feet nearing us, Paran Leeah and I hastily boarded our mounts, and with a single, stroking pres-

* The favorite mount of Martians. An animal slightly larger than a horse, but possessing an illusory appearance of massiveness due to a fluff of silken hair which flows lightly all about them, giving the impression of being immersed in water. They are delicate limbed and bodied, utterly transparent, so that one can easily observe the function of every organ. However, there is no beast whose strength and endurance can equal that of the fabulous jerei. It has a fleet running motion which seems to float along without jar or shock from contact with the ground. The impression of a rider is that of swift skating on ice, minus the usual body motion, gliding along at express-train speed. A jerei can travel sixty miles without halting, and in a Martian day, can easily cover two hundred miles, carrying two riders.—*Fauna of Mars, Settlement Survey.*

sure, to the base of the jerais' skulls, we were off, scarce able to see for the masses of hair in our faces. Those jerais will ever command my respect. Thin though their limbs, transparent their bodies beneath the fluff of hair, yet there is a speed and strength in them that surpasses comprehension!

We sped with hardly a sense of motion through the ghostly mist, the two tiny moons of Mars riding high above us, astride fairy creatures of silk and light.

For an hour, at what seemed accelerating pace, we were borne across land that had now become desert, fog gone, and safety, so we thought, ahead.

But then, from out of the distance, I heard the rhythm of pounding hoofs. My heart froze within me, as I realized that these jerais we strode were merely intended for the chariots of Crill, while those of the pursuing harrans were selected mounts, bred for speed.

Paran Leeah caught my attention. "Within the hour," he cried out, "they'll have us surrounded."

"And within the hour we'll cross the border into Werg," I made answer. "Onward!"

But though we coaxed our beasts to greater speed, and they seemed to comply, gentle animals, the sounds of pursuit grew.

Now, with Werg but five lothala distant, I could see our pursuers with the eye as I turned. We forged on, up and down the rise and fall of the desert, and once I caught the eyes of Thilna upon me. She murmured something I could not hear. I smiled, gestured an assurance I did not feel.

Abruptly, I saw mountains rising mistily out of the distance, and a choking emotion arose in my throat. Could we but make those mountains, the hilly country of my beloved Werg, all would be well. But I saw no escape, for within the moment, our pursuers would have us.

But a moment later, I noted with horror that Paran Leeah was not beside us. I twisted my head, and saw that his mount had come to a standstill. I saw Paran Leeah jump from the jerei, and calmly await the oncoming horde.

THEY bore down on him, shouting fiercely the war-cries of their ancient nation. Almost they were upon him, slight little prince of far Hioppi, but still he stood there.

Then a wonderous thing came about! The night turned into a hell of flame. The bulbous desert weeds reflected a vivid, leprous red. The stars, vivid though they were, were blotted out in that awful surge of brilliance.

I heard a horrible series of screams that quickly died out to a nothingness. A wave of fetid air struck my nostrils. All was quiet, now. I knew, then, that safety at last had claimed us.

A moment later Thilna, trembling from the reaction, was in my arms, and Paran Leeah's jerei gained our side. He leaped to the ground, smiling quietly.

He patted the flame pistol in his hand. "Useless

now," he said. "But it served its best purpose. We are safe. I to wend my way to my distant, helpless country, you, with your mission fulfilled, and the girl of your heart in your arms," and he looked strangely at Thilna. He added, heavily, "But I—without my Empress."

"How say you?" I demanded, struck by that look he gave Thilna. "My mission," and my own heart was heavy as I spoke, "is not fulfilled. True, I have the bracelet, and the princess of my heart, but the Princess of Werg is yet a prisoner in the land of Crill!"

Thilna reached up a gentle white hand and stroked my face. "Darak of Werg," she whispered, glorious eyes alight, "in your arms at this moment you hold, all in one, the princess of your heart, and the elusive Princess of Werg!"

I leaped back from her. "What say you?" I cried in shocked consternation.

"It is true," she insisted. "Paran Leeah, who saw me in the royal palace ere we met again on the Thasser, can vouch for me. It was the Princess of Werg who was spirited from the royal palace by Deodum, for his own evil purposes, on the very night you found me."

"But your hair!" I gasped, feeling as if the very universe were cracking about me. "It is night-black, while that of the princess is golden as the Sun itself!"

Paran Leeah, smiling with amusement, broke in. "I knew Thilna was the princess, Darak of Werg, the moment I set eyes upon her on the Thasser. It was the palace barber, a spy of Deodum's who dyed her hair—and it made an effective disguise. For there are no golden haired women in Crill."

Now the meaning came clear and rage rose within me. "You sent me into Jador on a fool's mission, then, when already I had attained my object!" I cried furi-

ously. It hurt to be made a fool by her I loved.

"Your object was your princess," she said, with a flash of her proud eyes. "But was not the Royal Hinusian Bracelet of more worth to Werg than a mere princess? Had I revealed my identity, you would not have dared leave me."

At this, I could not nurture my fury further, and taking her white hand in my own, I dropped speechlessly to one knee, so overcome was I with emotion.

Paran Leeah suddenly spoke, and I raised my head.

"I must go," he said, his fine eyes shadowed. He had gained his freedom, but had lost his Empress. "A long, happy life, to you, Darak of Werg, and to you, whom I know best as Thilna. It may be that someday we shall meet again, and may that day not be long."

"And may we meet again," I murmured as our eyes met in a salute that tokened our eternal friendship, "as King, once more, of Hioppi!"

Then he wheeled, mounted his jerai, and in a moment was lost in the enveloping night.

And I knelt at the feet of my princess, until she knelt beside me.

"Why do you kneel, Darak of Werg?" she said gently, tears sparkling on the edge of her lashes. "A royal Princess of Werg would not disdain in marriage the lowest laborer in the field."

She added, with a roguish quirk to her lips, "And my dear one, I hope that the mightiest warrior of Werg will not disdain in marriage the lowly maid of Jaray, whom he first met in the houseboat of Deodum on the Thasser."

Slowly I drew her to her feet, and full upon the lips I kissed her, my beloved, my princess in all truth now. And the scream of my jerai rose into the night, drifted off across the Martian wastes, as if to cement in fact a love which I felt the destruction of a world could not break asunder.

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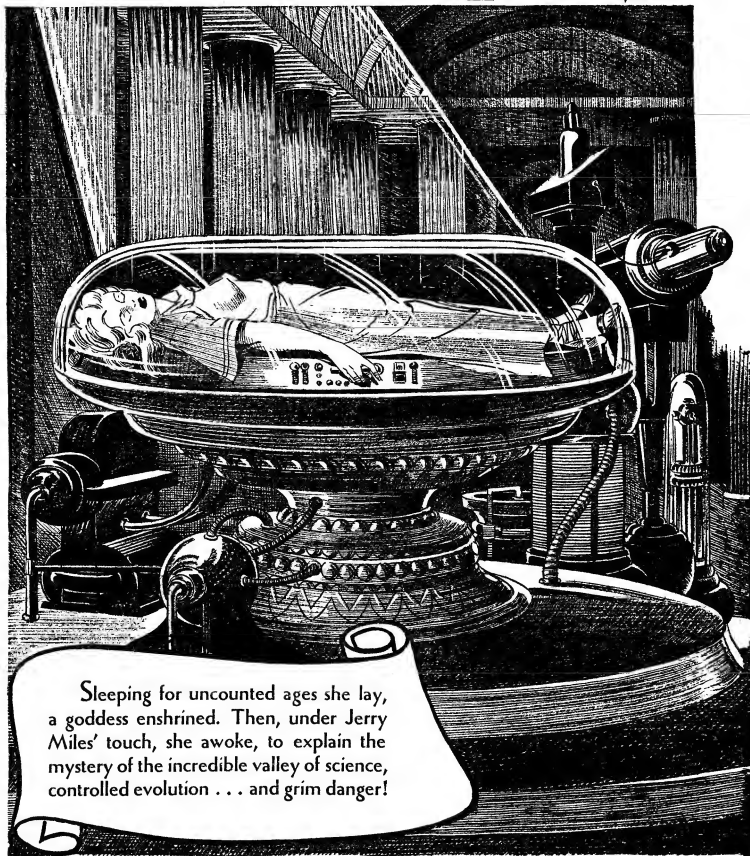
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Goddess

By
MAURICE DUCLOS

CHAPTER I The Glass Wall

"BLAZES!" muttered Jerry Miles. He rumbled his flaxen hair in perplexity. "Wish old Prof. Higgins back at U.S.C. could see this."

Jerry was gazing amazedly at such a scene as he had never before seen, and that it should be in the desert wastes of northern Afghanistan was equally as incredible.

Several hundred feet away were a number of squat buildings. Composed of a substance that might have been an opaque glass, they looked as if they had been molded in a gigantic die-cast. But these structures were mere details, for beyond towered an object that dwarfed all other buildings into puny insignificance.

It was a wall, a stupendous barrier that rose sheer, unguessable hundreds of feet heavenward, curving from sight on either side in the distance. More amazing yet was the fact that it was transparent! A titanic bulwark that might have been composed of a single piece of the finest crown glass!

He strode to it, and it loomed above huge as a mountain of quartz. For what curious purpose had it been built? It seemed sunk firmly in the earth, and rose sheer without a break to a terrible height.

Eagerness mounted in him as he saw a group of levers near a circular door. But they were jammed, and his mightiest efforts would not budge them.

Then he saw the ladder. A series of rungs, it was, projecting from the wall and extending up out of sight. They seemed molded as part of the wall itself firm and apparently safe.

In an instant Jerry was decided.

He started up the ladder. Keen anticipation fired him, and he worked vigorously at the task of climbing. Soon, however, he began to tire. Only then did he realize the seriousness of the task he had allotted himself. One little fumble or slip. . . .

Below, the little group of buildings contracted as they sank lower and lower. He could look over an immense distance, across the shimmering desert like a sea of silver. He had the horrible impression of being suspended free in space.

Finally, toward noon, his flagging muscles carried him slowly over the brink of the barrier and onto the top. He stumbled exhausted to its surface and lay for a while reveling in the feel of a solid mass beneath him. Then he raised his head.

Neena pointed dramatically toward the strangest, most lovely vision Jerry had ever seen, indeed a sleeping goddess!



THE top of the wall was perhaps fifty feet in width, apparently the same thickness as the base. It was as smooth and level as a dance floor, curving away in either direction like a modern highway. Directly across from him were the top rails of a ladder leading down the inner side.

Jerry rose stiffly to his feet, gave a wry glance behind him at the desert. The whole arid plain was visible, curving up to the surrounding mountains like a vast saucer. The height was terrific; three or four thousand feet, and the sense of it caught in his stomach like a nauseous weight. He turned away, approached the inner side of the barrier with quickening interest. An utterly strange, unearthly scene lay spread beneath him.

Weird jungle seemed to cover the land below. Jumbles of green, banks of livid crimson lining the lake, and here and there spots of yellow. Grotesque plants, possibly, vegetation bizarre and alien in appearance.

Stranger still was the atmosphere that filled the basin. Jerry grunted his amazement. A deep blue-green, almost of curdling consistency, it seemed, that covered the scene to within a few feet of the wall's top like a sea of water. Faint purple clouds floated within.

For a while Miles gazed at this landscape of weird beauty spread beneath him, wondering and speculating at all its mysteries. Then his eyes caught a steady unhurried movement over the masses of green; something rising upward. He saw that it was a giant brilliantly argent globe ascending through the blue gas. Wonder gripped him as he realized that it was a bubble, formed somehow on the plain of luxuriant vegetation below. As it rose nearer he saw that its diameter was perhaps ten feet, that it was moving quite fast. Then with a ripple it burst through the surface of gas and vanished into nothingness.

Jerry's gaze went back to the broad land beneath. Quickly he saw another moving sphere in the distance. Then two more at one side, and as he gazed intently he discovered more, dozens, hundreds of them scattered all over the basin floor in little clusters. They were motionless, but one here and there broke loose to glide to the surface—like bubbles in a fermenting liquid, he thought.

For a long time Miles gazed in rapt wonder at the jungle. He deliberated a little on venturing down, but there was a thick unwholesomeness about the gas filling the basin he didn't like. Then, too, the prospect of an added descent and climb was not pleasing.

But his curiosity overcame his inertia, and soon Miles found himself making the long ladder descent into the strange valley below. About him flowed the blue-green gas, tumbling and billowing upward like the slow moving figments of a dream. Warm, it was, laden with sweet heavy fragrance from nameless jungle growths. It exerted a physical pressure almost like a liquid, but aside from a few retching gasps, it seemed not to affect him.

With a tinge of elation, he soon reached bottom.

Spheres were all about, ranging from marble-size to giant ten foot globes that dotted the landscape with silver profusion. As he had suspected, they grew over clumps of vegetation, a large bubble here and there swaying gently till it broke from its insecure mooring to float up out of sight. Other spheres were in profusion, too, ones he had not seen before. They were larger than the bubbles, twenty to thirty feet, and hung suspended, balloon-like, a score of yards above the ground from tawny cables. Their green color had made them invisible from above, but now they stood out sharply, substantial enigmatic objects.

He cast a wary glance about. He could see the basin's massive wall curving to obscurity on either side far in the distance. Visibility was poor, and he realized also that the riotous foliage would offer convenient hiding places for dangerous animals. He hitched the gun holster to a more accessible position on his hip, then stepped forward onto the yielding moss carpet.

CHAPTER II

Neena

HARDLY had he taken a dozen steps than a faint rustling from a tangled bank of green before him drew his attention. He whipped out his gun, and then his muscles went limp in utter surprise.

For there stood a woman!

Jerry gasped his amazement. Nothing could have been more startlingly incongruous than a woman in this bizarre jungle. That the woman was of breathtaking loveliness only increased his surprise.

Her body was like a sleek pale-bronze flame of perilous beauty. A slender body curved and rounded, half clothed, half revealed by a silken tight-fitting robe of yellow. Her hair, Miles could see, fell about her shoulders like tumbling black tresses spun from the essence of cosmic space. Her eyes also were jet, her face oval, exotic, red lips curved in a smile as she stood gazing at him.

Then with graceful, almost feline movements she strode toward Jerry, halted before him. His throat felt choked, dry. Chaotic emotions pulsed through him at her nearness. She spoke, her voice soft, throaty, and again he started. For she used a root-form of the ancient Semitic tongue of which Aramic and Phoenician languages were representatives. Her meaning, if not her words, were clear.

She repeated them.

"Welcome to Iroq, Lord Zendap. We await your bidding." Then, as Miles stood in silent confusion, she went on, a puzzled frown wrinkling her brow. "You are silent. Something displeases you? I, Neena, High Priestess of Iroq, have come alone to welcome you; that is as it should be. Perhaps it is I then, in whom you find disfavor?"

She stood close before Miles, the dark pools of her eyes looking deep into his, the heady fragrance of her

hair thick in his nostrils. She was like a pulse-quickening vision of Astarte come to life. Yet there was something in the dark depths of her eyes that sent a little tug of doubt through him. It was a cold calculating something that seemed not so much a conscious quality as it was inborn. Yet Jerry's senses pounded at the nearness of the woman. Slowly a smile once again parted those crimson lips. She had seen the undisguised admiration on his face.

Miles struggled for words, his tongue fumbling the unfamiliar syllables. "No one—god—or mortal, could find fault with such as you. It is merely that your words confuse me. I am not Lord Zendfap— whoever he might be."

The woman's laugh was like the sonorous mellow notes of a bell. She let her eyes pass over him, his strong square-cut face, his tall muscular body.

"Lord Zendfap jests," she said appreciatively. "Who else could come from the nether land beyond the Wall? Indeed, who else could breathe the evil air? And you are different, much different from the men of Iroq. . . ."

Her eyes glowed deeply as she appraised him anew.

Quick interest stirred in Jerry. Was it possible that people had lived in this strange thick atmosphere so long that normal air was injurious to them?

"The air up there"—he gestured up at the misty dimness of the cyclopean wall—"is poison to your people?"

The black eyes widened with surprise. "Not poison. It isn't enough—to breathe. Surely Lord Zendfap knows that! But come. The people of Iroq await you."

SHE was at his side, crooking a warm bare arm through his. She faced the weird forest then, and uttered a clear, shrill call. Immediately from somewhere ahead came a dull *thud, thud, thud* as of huge thumping feet, and the sound of bodies smashing through fleshy growths.

Unconsciously Miles tensed himself, set his jaw grimly. There was an alien unnatural note to that sound he didn't like. But the next moment his muscles sagged in complete surprise. For, pushing between a tangle of yellow vegetation was a thing so strange, so utterly at variance to any surrounding that he could do nothing but stare.

A lustrous red machine was coming toward them. But a machine that stood on four jointed legs projecting outward spider fashion. Eight feet tall it was, its body a stubby upright cylindrical section from which three pliable tapering tentacles dangled. Surmounting its body was a "head," a ruddy metal globe four feet in diameter, completely smooth except for three lens-tubes protruding outward and spaced triangularly, close together.

The thing thudded forward on metal feet, and its lens seemed to glow with sentient consciousness. The hair on Miles' neck stiffened. He dropped his hand to his holster.

Neena saw the movement and must have sensed something of Jerry's perplexity. She laughed gaily. . .

"It is only one of my servants. I left them to wait beyond the foliage. They will take us into Iroq."

Miles saw that two more of the robots, identical to the first, were striding up. Dangling from two outward held tentacles of the third was a canopied litter, elaborately embellished and inscribed with strange characters. As the metal thing halted near by, Jerry became conscious of a soft whirring noise issuing from each, like the mechanical rhythm of turning shafts and gears.

A slim golden arm was tugging at Jerry's sleeve. "Come," said the woman's throaty voice. "Your sedan chair, Lord Zendfap." She gestured, urged him towards the richly bedecked seat dangling from the robot's appendages. Dazedly he seated himself, noticing absently that the tentacles did not sag in the least under his weight.

Desperately he tried to shake off the aura of strangeness and unreality that held him. Certainly this was no dream or hallucination, this incredible world in which he found himself. This fantastic transparent wall cupping a strange thick atmosphere and bizarre jungle. And then the woman herself—Neena, High Priestess of Iroq, she had called herself. Where did she fit in? Certainly her kind had not built the wall, for her few words had shown her to believe in a "nether land" beyond, and in a pagan god "Zendfap."

Miles smiled faintly. The thought of duplicity did not please him, but neither could he turn from something that promised novel adventure. He couldn't help it if she insisted he was that god Zendfap!

NEENA was seating herself gracefully in the canopied palanquin next to him. She uttered a sharp command and the contrivance jolted into life, stalked forward with a steady mechanical stride that sent the litter swaying like a birdcage in the grasp of a running man. The other two automatons followed at either side and a little behind. Lithely the woman leaned toward Jerry.

"Long ages have my people kept sentries to watch for your coming. Today their vigil ended when they saw you ascend the Wall. Your quarters at the Palace are in readiness."

She called another command and their strange steed plunged forward more swiftly.

The green balloons that he had discovered on emerging from the "elevator," proved to be plants. Huge thirty foot spheres of vegetative tissue apparently filled with sustaining gas and growing to the ground by cable-stalks. At the juncture where these stems entered earth they were provided with thorns, cruel spear-sized spines radiating outward like the closely spaced spokes of a huge wheel; a natural *cheval-de-frise* that would certainly protect the stalk.

Miles felt a desire to question Neena about these odd plants, but something deep within him cautioned, warned him peremptorily not to show too great an ig-

norance. Zendfap would be expected to know all about his land. And Jerry remembered, too, that cold something that lurked in the depths of the woman's eyes. What would happen if she were to be convinced he was not a deity? No telling what power she wielded in this fantastic place. . . .

The robots were carrying them swiftly over the mossy ground. They mounted the crest of a gentle swell and for a moment Jerry could peer above the massed vegetation. His eyes were caught by a slender white tower thrusting up dimly in the distant thick atmosphere. Neena gave a quick nod at it.

"Yonder is the Temple of the Gods. You shall dwell there after your wedding day."

Jerry coughed, choked back his surprise. "My wedding day?" he managed in a voice that didn't ring with the nonchalance intended.

"Truly," replied Neena, black eyes studying him enigmatically. "What other reason would bring Zendfap among the mortals of Iroq?"

"What other indeed?" responded Miles, and determined mentally to learn more about the god Zendfap at his first opportunity.

PRESENTLY their ruddy steed carried them to a wide trail cleared of the carpeting moss. It cut straight over the low hillocks toward the white spire visible now, looming larger each second above the clustered brilliant vegetation. Finally the path widened into a well-defined road, and here and there appeared low stone houses, crude of construction. People lined the way; not a shouting waving throng, but a silent curious one. He saw that they were a thick-set, swarthy folk; on the whole the crowd displayed dull-witted imperviousness.

The woman at Jerry's side sat stiffly, regally in the chair as they passed down the thickening aisle of people.

They were in a village now, all the houses and buildings constructed uniformly and unskillfully from dark stone; certainly not the handiwork of the people who had built the great wall. . . .

Directly down the road, and looming above all, was that slender tower of white. The beauty of its unearthly architecture caught in Jerry's throat. He gestured at it.

"It is old, the Temple of the Gods?" He tried to keep the querying inflection from his voice, but Neena glanced up quickly, eyed him quizzically.

"None should know better than you, my Lord. It has been here since the beginning, even before the first mortal touched foot on Iroq's soil. It is—Temple of the Gods."

The thronged people stood away respectfully from about the white building, nor did they follow as the robot carrying Miles and Neena plodded mechanically to the temple and halted before a low white porch. With lithe grace the woman sprang from the litter. She turned to face Miles and he read a baffling challenge, a malicious eagerness in her eyes.

"Come," sounded her mellow voice, "I know you are anxious to see the Sleeping Goddess. . . ."

Obedient in silent wonder, Jerry stepped from the swinging litter and followed at the girl's side into a long cool corridor with slender flanking pilasters alternately fluted and twisted. Then up a spidery curving stairway to a magnificent circular room, steeply vaulted.

CHAPTER III

Sleeping Goddess

THE circular room itself was strikingly bare except for the highly carved and ornamented walls. The floor was a glistening black expanse like a polished obsidian dance floor. In the center was a dais upon which rested a golden metal object perhaps seven feet in length. Oblong, it was, and reminded Miles strongly of a coffin.

Neena's slim arm was in his, drawing him to it.

"See," she whispered throatily, "the Sleeping Goddess!"

Jerry stared through the curved transparent covering of the golden box, and his eyes were caught by the vision within.

She lay stretched there as if in death, a young woman of pale cameo-like beauty. Hair lustrous golden as the coffin that held her, coiled spirals of it falling about the pure whiteness of an aristocratic face. Fine matchless beauty was there, more enhanced by the slender curves of her body showing beneath the silken whiteness of a simple gown. Her tiny feet were shod in classical sandals.

Jerry could not repress an intake of breath. Here was real beauty, understandable womanly loveliness, nothing of the perilous beauty of Neena.

Something else within the golden coffin caught his eye. The girl's right arm lay at her side and close to her relaxed hand was a group of small silver levers projecting from the plush-lined wall. Strange dials and meters were there too. Some faint suspicion of the truth sent the blood pounding eagerly through Jerry's veins. The *Sleeping Goddess*: could it be that . . . ?

Neena's black eyes were upon him, her carmine lips twisted in an oblique smile. Obviously some response was expected of him.

He nodded down at the beautiful reposed figure. "When," he said boldly, deliberately, "will the Sleeping Goddess awaken?"

Quick surprise flooded her face to be instantly masked by an expressionless stare. "I would not presume to know," she replied. "That is for my Lord to decide!" And she bowed extravagantly to Miles.

He cursed under his breath. Every verbal tilt so far had gone to this sleek dark beauty at his side. It seemed nothing could escape the flashing intuitive stare of those eyes—and that sinister something in their depths was growing. Soon, very soon, perhaps, a crisis would be reached and something told him it

would not be pleasant.

Jerry let his eyes feast once again on the beauty of the golden-haired girl beneath the transparent lid. Here certainly was the crux of the whole baffling adventure, the key that would explain, that would fit each mystery into a completed whole with kaleidoscopic precision. But, and Miles felt a tug of hopelessness, it required at least rudimentary knowledge to use the key. He lacked even that!

Neena was near at hand, her honeyed tones soft. "Always has the Sleeping Goddess rested here. And once, when Iroq was young she awoke, came among our people and blessed them. But that was long ages ago, Lord Zendfap, and then one morning she had returned to her bed of sleep." A faint malicious glitter appeared in the jet eyes. "She awaits only your touch to rise again!"

Jerry had a sudden quickening of interest. Neena's words were probably barbaric legend, yet it tied in with a growing suspicion of his. Those levers and dials within the golden casket were not mere decorations. Vital scientific reason must be behind it all. But he could not investigate with the cold eyes of Neena watching him.

He wheeled abruptly, faced the woman squarely. "Priestess," he said, "I will awaken the Sleeping Goddess so that she may walk once again among the people of Iroq. But the time has not yet come. Right now I tire, and would taste of your earthly food."

The ebony head bowed in assent, and Jerry could not see her face as she answered: "Your desire is my command."

She turned with him and glided lithely across the black crystal floor toward the stairs. Her slim yellow-cased figure was close to Miles, the Stygian torrents of her hair tumbling about her shoulders, the perilous mystery of her enveloping him like the heady fragrance of perfume. Worlds different she was, from that still golden-crowned beauty back there.

DUSK was in the thick atmosphere when Neena and Jerry emerged from the white temple. Three grotesque metal robots stood stiffly in their former positions, and further beyond at a respectful distance from the tower waited the stocky people of Iroq.

The woman waved a slim bronzed arm at the canopied seat. "Come; my servants will carry us to the Palace."

She was beside him in the litter then, and a spoken word to the automaton brought it to life. Its jointed metal legs moved and it clumped rapidly into the street, the throng making way for it. As before, the robot retinue escorted them.

Darkness was settling fast within the hazy confines of the great wall, seeming to pour in like ink into a tumbler of water. But the stomping robots did not slacken their stride; some uncanny sense seemed to guide them unerringly. The swaying of the seat threw Neena close against him. His heart leaped. Her exotic oval face shown palely through the darkness,

turned up to his.

"The best of Iroq is yours," she whispered. "May your stay at the Palace be pleasing; you are my guest, I High Priestess of Iroq!"

Swiftly the ruddy machine carried the swaying litter along a paved path between alternate banks of vegetation. Miles glanced about him in silent confusion. The coming of evening had only increased the unreality, the dream-like quality of everything. He turned almost desperately to gaze at the girl beside him in the chair. Her face was calm, undisturbed, eyes looking ahead at a squat building looming directly before them.

At a command from Neena the robots had slowed their pace, then they were clattering through a passage illuminated ineffectually by occasional smoking torches. Another word from the girl halted the machines beside stone steps leading upward. A short hallway was on the second floor, and Neena drew him toward a large bronze door. It swung open at her touch, revealing a wide square room.

Standing within the doorway were four men. Stocky, powerful, dark as were all the men of Iroq. The very similarity of three, cast them as nondescript individuals. Plainly attired they were, in livid-red robes and sandals. Their dark features were thick, coarse, reflecting brute dullness.

The fourth man differed only in his clothes and the stamp of his face. A silken purple garment was draped imperiously over his broad shoulders, and beneath it flared loose trousers of the same hue. Sullen harshness was visible on his swarthy face, reflected in the thick hawk-nose, the twist of the wide lips. And a brutish sense of power was there, too, lurking in the crafty depths of his eyes. Here was a force in the destinies of Iroq.

He bowed low, and the three red-robes beside him followed suit.

Neena's throaty voice sounded: "This is Borko, my Chief Administrator, and his deputies."

The man stepped back from the doorway, flung out his arm in gesture. "This is your dwelling place, Lord Zendfap," he said in a thick voice. "Never has it been occupied; endlessly have we kept the torches burning in hope that some day you would come . . . we are honored, and pleased!"

But as Miles entered the room, Neena's arm in his, he saw that Borko was far from pleased. Jealous hatred blazed in the man's eyes.

Revealed in the flaring light of cressets, the chamber was barbarously resplendent with furnishings and trappings. Pelt rugs littered the floor, strange skins that Jerry could not classify. Blue and orange fresco work decorated the walls, and at one side was a waist-high block of stone, the top hollowed to form a basin. Flanking it were two huge urns of water.

Neena gave a graceful bow of her head, excused herself, and walked to the door. She turned then, looked back at Miles. Like a pale-bronze medallion she stood, the flaring light playing over the yellow

of her gown. And in the mirroring pools of her eyes was a mocking challenge, an enigmatic promise of caprice that sent Jerry's blood thumping through his veins.

Then she was gone.

BUT that glance had not escaped the beady eyes of Borko. Ill-concealed rage flooded his hawk-nosed face, and Miles knew that here was an implacable enemy, one that would cause trouble sooner or later.

A moment he stood in front of Jerry, eyeing him boldly.

"The clothes of Lord Zendfap are strange," he growled. "I have always thought they would be robes of the priesthood . . ."

"Indeed?" snapped Miles. "Are you one to judge?"

A shadow of fear passed over the swarthy face. "Your pardon, Lord Zendfap," he murmured. Then, hurriedly: "I will have food served."

Deliberately Jerry turned his back upon the four men, strode across the room to a huge window—and he could almost feel the hate-filled eyes of Borko piercing his back. Somehow the Chief Administrator had guessed that he was not a divinity!

Sound of the opening door behind him wheeled Miles about. Five servants were entering the room, bearing silver platters crowded with food. Silently they placed the trays upon short cradling tripods near a banked pile of cushions. Then, at a gesture from Borko they retired.

"Food, Lord Zendfap," said the purple-garbed Administrator with a humbleness that did not deceive Jerry.

When Miles had seated himself cross legged upon a pillow before one of the trays, the four officials took positions opposite him. He did full justice to the meal. There were odd-flavored cooked vegetables, a variety of strange fruit and nuts, and tender meat.

Borko's eyes were on him, again growing insolently belligerent in their scrutiny.

"Lord Zendfap finds *earthly* food pleasing?" He leered mockingly.

Jerry caught the implication. He realized that Borko, becoming ever more certain that he was not immortal, would soon make trouble. The only way to check such an occurrence was to overawe, bluff.

"It amuses me to taste your crude offerings," he retorted imperiously.

Brief anger flared in the obsidian eyes. "But you *do* eat food like a common mortal," growled Borko boldly. "You look like a mortal . . ."

"Watch your tongue!" snapped Miles threateningly. "Displease me, Administrator, and I may destroy you with thundering death!"

The three red-garbed deputies, Jerry could see, were afraid. The swarthy of their faces had changed to an apprehensive white. But Borko was unconvinced, had lost all caution.

"Your words are mighty," he grunted. "But words

are useless; what proof have you that you are in truth Lord Zendfap?"

"Proof that will crush you if you anger me further!" growled Jerry. He jerked out his pistol, leveled it quickly at one of the water urns across the room. Three shots crashing on the heels of one another smashed the earthenware crock to pieces. Water splattered on the floor.

The three deputies reached the door in a single concerted rush, struggled through, hoarse wails of fear on their lips. Borko retained his position with obvious difficulty. His mouth was open, his thick harsh features distorted with baffled surprise.

Quickly he bowed his head to Miles, mumbled an apology.

Jerry pointed at the door. "Go!" he thundered, "before I lose patience!"

Borko obeyed with alacrity.

And Miles, watching the powerful purple-clothed figure leave, knew that the man had not been convinced one iota of his divinity.

CHAPTER IV

Puppets of Evolution

JERRY did not wait for further developments. Now, if ever, was the time to visit the white temple and the golden Sleeping Goddess. Key to the whole mystery was there; all he had to do was find it. In any event, a secret foray could do no harm.

He crossed to the rectangle window, crawled over the wide sill, and let himself down by his arms. He dropped lightly upon the roof of the first story, then repeated the performance from the roof, landed on thick carpeting moon. All was quiet in the dusk shrouded courtyard.

Obviously there were no guards about, nor was there need for them. Jerry strode freely along curving paths among the banked foliage until he came to the low arching gate. He halted momentarily, peered into the darkened street. It was deserted. Even if he did chance upon someone he would attract no untoward attention in the darkness.

He made the trip to the Temple of the Gods quickly and uneventfully. Its slender white tower shimmered faintly in the moonlight, guiding him like a beacon.

Quickly he mounted the graceful curving staircase to the silent splendor of the rotunda above. As he strode to the golden coffin he was startled to see light flooding from the interior through the transparent lid. Jerry leaned forward. The illumination, he saw, came from a cleverly concealed indirect lighting tube circling the coffin where the lid and plush-lined interior met. And the warm glow played over the still form of the Sleeping Goddess.

Her pale beauty seemed scarcely earthly now, with the light rippling on the golden cascades of her hair, etching in faint strokes of shadow the long lashes and the closed lids. Full sensitive mouth was deep pink.

Here was a vibrant loveliness strangely piquant. But as she lay there Miles wondered if indeed she had ever risen from the "sleep."

He looked again at the levers and dials on the casket wall. They were well within reach of the girl's hand. But there seemed no way of discovering their purpose; there were no duplicating levers on the outside. . . . Sudden inspiration made him examine the thick carvings on the coffin's exterior directly opposite the inside levers. Almost immediately he perceived a fine circle in the gold; like the flush end of a small shaft, it appeared. And in this circle was a shallow square hole plainly at variance to the sweeping curves of the other engravings. It seemed to him that a lever was meant to fit in that hole.

Jerry substituted the handle of his bowie knife, forcing the squared end into the hole. Then he twisted upon the blade.

His heart thumped. The circle was turning slowly! He bent low over the coffin, saw that a single inside lever was also moving; it then, was connected to the golden shaft he was twisting. Abruptly sounded the click of a moving tumbler. The shaft would budge no further. Soft whirring of hidden machinery issued from somewhere beneath the coffin, the hiss of gas under pressure. And then Miles jerked erect with a low gasp on his lips.

The curving transparent lid of the casket was swinging silently back!

A PUNGENT odor wafted outward and the girl lay exposed to reach. Breathlessly he looked close. Faint flushing pink was flowing through her ivory cheeks, and a rhythmic pulsation of her breast began. Then a flutter jerked the blond lashes, they lifted. Deep brown eyes stared uncomprehendingly upward. Quickly calm intelligence came to those eyes, and the Sleeping Goddess sat up in the silken trough of the coffin—a miniature on ivory come to life; delicate features, gown sheer white, sleeveless, high-waisted and pleated.

A moment she absorbed the lean height of Jerry with speculative brown eyes. Queer hope came into them, and she smiled up.

"You are from the city of Nu-Der?" Her tones were liquid, the words oddly inflected, more of a classic form even than those of Neena.

Pulsing excitement made Jerry's voice disturbingly thick. "I've never heard of—Nu-Der."

The woman's face registered vague disappointment. "Then you live here in Iroq?"

"Hardly." Miles gave a short laugh. "I've been here only since this afternoon. Because I came from—outside, the people think I'm a god!"

Quick interest lit the brown eyes and the girl leaned forward eagerly. Her hair rippled in a golden cascade about slim shoulders.

"You are from beyond the Wall then! You have seen the shining city nestled in the far mountains?" Jerry shook his head. "There is no city there."

The girl bowed her golden head and her voice came tonelessly: "It is as I suspected; Nu-Der is no more."

Miles struggled to keep growing wonder in hand. "Why do you speak of this city, Nu-Der? What is the purpose of the wall around Iroq, and why have you slept for ages in this white tower?"

The tawny eyes were studying Jerry's bronzed square face. Then abruptly she became conscious of the man's own intent stare. She flushed. "You speak my tongue oddly. Your land is far away?"

He nodded, gestured vaguely with his arm. "On the other side of the world across wide oceans."

"And you have great men of learning, of science?"

"Many," responded Miles.

"Then you will understand what I have to say," she explained. "Once I lived in Nu-Der. Never in all the world was there such a city. A city of science. Things to stun the mind with wonder; knowledge was the gauge of a man's wealth."

"But the mystery of life still escaped the masters. And so they built this great transparent cup, filled it with a thick atmosphere that would speed up evolution enormously. All the materials and constituents of life were placed in it. But no spore or germ was allowed to enter. Life would come of its own accord and they would watch it grow and evolve, and perhaps learn its immemorial secret."

"But they knew that even with the speeding effect of the gas many years would pass before life would appear; that civilizations might rise and fall."

Miles nodded eagerly. "Go on."

"So the scientists built this tower. I was chosen to dwell within it, travel down through the ages by suspended animation; gas within this golden box achieves that. Every five thousand years it would automatically open, return me to life so that I might check the progress of evolution within the wall, and carry that knowledge to some future race—and so it has been."

"Every five thousand years I have awakened and made brief studies of a few weeks, returning once again to my bed of sleep. I have seen the first wriggings of life, have watched it grow into the weird forests yonder. I have studied humans on the long ladder of evolution, have seen them form the primitive empire of Iroq here within the wall."

"And during all these millenniums my shining city of Nu-Der has come with me, larger, more wondrous each time I beheld it. But alas, on my last awakening no scientists were here to greet me. I could not travel on foot across the burning desert to Nu-Der, and so I went to sleep again fearful that I was now fulfilling the duty for which I had been placed here—that my great civilization had crumbled somehow, to nothingness."

"You, man of the future, have confirmed that belief." The golden head bowed in sorrow.

MILES shifted his feet. The sheer immensity of her story whetted his wonder, yet even stronger

than this curiosity was a desire to take the girl in his arms and comfort her. The loss of her city, her very people must have created a gnawing void within her. But all he could manage in way of consolation was a soft: "All things must end sometime."

The brown eyes lifted to his and they cleared bravely. "You are right. Regret is useless." Her delicate rose lips parted in a faint smile. "I am called Orleen, and you. . . ?"

"Jerry Miles."

"Jerry Miles," she repeated, her mellow voice imparting a liquid inflection to the syllables. "It is a pleasing name—and Jerry, the dials show that I have slept only four thousand years this time. Is it—?"

"I woke you," he put in hastily. "When I saw you resting there so calm and lifelike, so beautiful I couldn't believe you dead. . . ." He clipped off his words, confused at their ardent rush.

A pleased flush colored Orleen's cheeks and her laugh was like the musical clatter of silver coins. "I do not mind. I had thought perhaps the natives of Iroq had discovered the means of opening my casket."

Miles frowned with sudden remembrance. "No. I don't understand it either. Their priestess has marvelous robots, yet no one seems to recognize those levers as being controls of some kind."

Again the woman's silver laugh sounded. "I gave those robots to the savages of Iroq four thousand years ago. I taught them my language, hoped the machines would hasten their march toward civilization. Apparently it was a useless gesture."

For a moment there was silence in the ornate rotunda while Miles tried to orient his rushing thoughts. The jig-saw mystery was piecing together bit by bit. This girl from the immemorial past sitting gracefully there like a golden goddess had truly been the key-stone to the whole baffling structure. Incredible tale it was!

Abruptly as Miles stood in the clear light by the gilded casket he became aware of footsteps ascending on the stairway from below. Baseless surging panic gripped him.

He spun to Orleen. "Quick!" he whispered urgently. "Someone's coming. They mustn't find you awake!"

The girl's eyes widened with dread. She clutched at his arm. "You will not desert me, Jerry? You will wake me again?"

"I swear it! As soon as I'm able. Hurry, close the lid!"

She gave his arm a trusting squeeze, then dropped back among the silken plush of the casket. Her hand flicked over a tiny silver lever and the transparent lid swung silently into place. She looked up at Jerry, a tremulous smile about her lips. Then a second lever slid back beneath her hand. Somewhere within sounded the muffled escape of gas. Her eyelids fluttered, closed, and once again Orleen was the Sleeping Goddess of Iroq.

A footstep sounded behind Miles. He wheeled to look into the faintly smiling face of Neena. Taunting mockery shone boldly in her black eyes.

"Does Lord Zendfap find his quarters at the Palace so unsuited that he seeks shelter in the Temple? Or is it the beauty of the Sleeping Goddess that draws him?"

Dull anger surged within him. "Since when," he demanded incisively, "must a Lord account to you, Priestess?"

The expression on the exotic oval face did not alter. But she said humbly, "I beg your forgiveness," and gave a quick bow of her head. Then she turned. "Come. My metal servants wait to take us to the Palace."

CHAPTER V

Neena's Offer

NEXT morning when Miles woke among the piled blankets and pillows of the big stone room he made an immediate and chilling discovery. As he buckled on his cartridge belt and holster, he saw that his pistol was missing. A quick search assured him that it had not fallen among the cushions.

Anger and apprehension flared within him. Only two people, of course, would have the audacity or the reason to steal his gun while he slept: Neena and Administrator Borko.

The High Priestess might have doubted his godly eminence, was perhaps planning to someway capitalize on his appearance in Iroq, had taken his gun to assure her success.

Or Borko, fired by jealous hatred and belief that he, Miles, was not Zendfap, might have pilfered it.

In any event, Jerry knew that the weapon was irrevocably lost to him. The fact that its loss foretold danger did not add to his peace of mind.

Three red-jacketed men brought his breakfast. But when he sought to question them concerning the activities of Neena and Borko, they professed ignorance, withdrew hurriedly.

It was not until noon that Neena, accompanied by Borko, came to call upon him. The Priestess' slender pale-bronze figure was clothed in livid green, her ebony hair falling on the shoulders of a milky-white jacket. Dark oblique eyebrows and crimson lips gave exotic mystery to her face.

She extended a slim arm to Miles. "Lord Zendfap," she said, "we wish to show you more of the land of Iroq. My metal servants await us. . . ."

Borko's swarthy hawk-nosed face was carefully devoid of expression. He bowed low in greeting, saluted Miles as Lord Zendfap. Over his shoulders was the same purple chamys, voluminous enough, Jerry realized, to conceal a sword—or a pistol. But Miles determined not to mention the theft; it would do no good, would only be an admission of his concern.

In the Palace's lower passageway the three robots stood like bulbous red spiders. Now both the first and second machines were provided with litters. Neena seated herself next to Miles; Borko took his position in the second automaton. At a call the stiff metal legs jerked into motion.

UPON noticing a movement in the underbrush, Neena let out a sharp command. The third robot darted forward. A pig-like six-legged animal scurried swiftly from under the pulpy leaves, but not swiftly enough. A flash of ruddy metal legs and in a trice the unfortunate beast was snapped off the ground in the grip of a coiling tentacle. It screamed horribly and its brown eyes bulged in death as the metal tentacle contracted.

Sickening disgust filled Jerry, most of it directed at the woman at his side. She was intently leaning forward, breast heaving with excitement. Borko, in the second robot, was leering appreciatively.

"Sport of the Gods!" cried Neena. "Nothing escapes my metal servants; they can scent and trail quarry to the ends of Iroq!"

Miles reclined far back in the swaying seat, thoughtfully silent. What was the point of this demonstration? A subtle warning calculated to impress him with their power? If so, it could not have originated on Borko's part, for he was plainly not a man of subtleties.

Dusk was near when the tour was completed and the robots finally directed back towards the village and the Palace. But Jerry's thoughts were of the gleaming white tower, and the golden-haired goddess immured there. The appeal in her voice for his return still lingered with him. He couldn't let her down; somehow he'd fulfill that hurried promise to awaken her once again.

When they reached the Palace, Neena conducted him to a room on the ground floor. Borko entered also, but the priestess turned quickly to him.

"You may leave, Administrator," she said calmly. Instantly jealous anger flared on his harsh features, and a snarling protest rose to his lips.

She cut him short. "Go!"

A moment he stood, then bowed stiffly in assent. But as he turned away he shot a glance at Miles from eyes snapping with hatred.

THE room was small. Colored, finely-woven reed mats covered the stone floor, the walls ornate with flowing tapestries. At one side was a circular green-tiled bathing pool, on the other a large window giving into the dusk shadowed court. Smoke from the flickering cressets seemed incensed. The room, Jerry realized with vague discomfort, was typically feminine.

Neena was quick to see his wondering glance. "This is my chamber. I wish you to dine with me. . . ."

A soft tumbled mass of pillows was piled against the nearer wall and she drew him toward it, pulled

him down with a slim bare arm. He seated himself Turkish-fashion on a cushion, sat awkwardly erect. He sensed that planned events were working into shape; that he must be on guard.

From her supine position of the pillows, Neena clapped her hands. Six trailing servants entered bearing food. They were short men, wearing the same style red tunics and white short-cut pantaloons Miles had seen before. The Priestess waved them away after they had deposited the trays on a cluster of tripods.

Jerry ate sparingly, aware that Neena only dabbed at her food. The inscrutable dark eyes rose often to his, and he was conscious that the meal was only the prelude of things to come. He nodded his head at the food.

"The people of Iroq live well, Priestess," he remarked, trying to ease an awkward situation.

"Only because the Gods are generous," she retorted silkily. "You are pleased with us, Lord Zendaf?"

He hid his wonderment. "I find no fault."

"Then you have chosen your wedding day?"

Inwardly Miles jumped. The blow had fallen from an unexpected quarter. He was aware that the woman had moved closer to him on the pillow, was regarding him from beneath lowered lashes. The best he could do was counter boldly.

"Why all this interest in the marriage, Priestess? What are days compared to ages of waiting? I see no reason for its immediate fulfillment."

Abruptly, as he half reclined on the cushions, he felt the vibrant warm nearness of Neena's body against his, caught the thick intoxicating perfume of her jet hair.

"Perhaps," she said, her voice a throaty whisper, "the bride grows impatient!"

The truth burst upon him in a single illuminating flood. And that flood was instantly absorbed in a maelstrom of emotion; for Neena's slim bronze arms had slid about his neck, soft yet strong as they pulled him toward the exotic upturned oval of her face. Alien depths of her eyes were aglitter with exultation.

Abrupt panic seized him. He tore loose, pushed her back upon the cushions.

"You are Priestess of Iroq," he growled at her severely. "And you are mortal. A mortal can not mate a god!"

Neena had drawn angrily erect, breast heaving. Then strangely she relaxed; a smile parted the full red lips.

"You speak truly," came her voice with perilous sweetness. "A mortal may not wed with immortal—but you are not Zendaf! *You are not a god!*"

JERRY felt a sudden weak deflatedness. Her words had stabbed like a knife ripping a bladder.

"I suspected from the first," she said triumphantly. "You knew too little of the ways of Iroq. And then last night in the Temple my beliefs were confirmed. . . ."

A gasp wrenched from his lips. "You heard Orleen and me?"

"Truly. I followed you to the Temple, heard every word between you. You are not a god—neither is the *Sleeper!*"

Setting his jaw, Miles faced her defiantly. "So what?" he gritted.

Faint mockery shone in her eyes and she shrugged delicately molded shoulders. "I do not care. In truth it has allowed me to make certain plans—"

"Then *you* took my gun?" interrupted Jerry impulsively.

"Gun?" Neena's voice was querulous. "What is gun?"

"My thundering weapon."

She dismissed the matter with a petulant shake of her head. "I know nothing of your weapon."

And strangely, Miles knew that she had spoken truthfully. It was Borko . . .

Again the Priestess was speaking

"My people need never know you are not Zendtap; they are content, not unduly curious. No one would see wrong in our marriage!"

"A certain Administrator would hardly be pleased," Jerry pointed out.

"He can be—removed!"

"I'm sorry, Neena; your offer doesn't appeal to me."

Angrily the ebony head tossed. "You spurn a throne of the gods? A kingdom to do with as you choose? Wealth! Power! The whole of Iroq to do your bidding?"

"Oh, it isn't that—"

"What more could one desire?" she demanded with fierce intensity. "Am I ugly? Do you find me so repulsive you dread the thought of sharing my throne?"

"No one can deny your beauty, Neena—"

"Then what displeases you?" she murmured, slipping close to him again. "I have not seen your like before. The men of Iroq are thick and short and ugly. You are tall, slim, your hair is the color of yellow moss . . ."

Again slim arms stole about his neck, and the warm nearness of her whirled in his brain. The flushed pale-bronze of her face was upturned, eyes black pools, full reddened lips close . . . abruptly he threw his arm around her lithe body, crushed his lips against hers.

When he lifted his head he was trembling a bit, and a guilty stab went through him as he thought of that fair sleeping girl in the Temple. Somehow that kiss seemed like a betrayal.

"What of Orleen?" he asked huskily.

Neena's voice was close, mellow. "She shall continue to be—the Sleeping Goddess!"

The heady appeal of Neena vanished; he tore her arms roughly away, sprang to his feet.

The stiff legs of the automaton jerked into motion.

FEATURES contorted, Neena leaped up. A small hand was digging in the lining of her jacket. Jerry stumbled backward in time to avoid the thrust of a slim ivory stiletto. He clutched her wrist, upsetting the silver trays as he wrenched it from her hand. He hurled the carved white weapon across the room where it shattered against the stone wall of the room.

With a choking cry of utter fury she hurled herself at him, slashing, clawing, biting. It was like holding



an enraged tigress in his arms, and for a few seconds he struggled desperately to grasp those raking talons. But she fought with furious demoniac energy.

Miles realized forcibly that he had incurred in her a hatred that would be appeased only in his death. He lunged out with both hands, hurled her bodily backward onto the pile of cushions. A moment she lay there eyes blazing, face contorted. "Fool!" she shrieked. "I'll—"

Abruptly, in the midst of that blurred moment, a pistol shot crashed into the room. A bullet whined past Jerry's head.

Framed in the blackness of the open doorway was the stocky bull-form of Borko holding Miles' automatic in a lax hand. Surprised incredulity flooded his hawk-nosed face; for Miles had not broken like the urn when the weapon was turned on it . . .

Deliberately Jerry strode toward the Administrator. "No use, Borko," he growled. "The thundering weapon works only for me!"

Fear twisted the thick swarthy features, and Borko wheeled, plunged from view.

Neena's voice knifed out in call behind Jerry. And somewhere down the passageway beyond the door sounded a responsive mechanical thumping of metal feet. The robots!

That heavy reverberation woke blind surging terror within him; only too fresh in his mind was the demonstration he had witnessed. He wheeled, spurted across the brilliant reed mats, and as he scrambled over the thick window sill into the courtyard, Neena's hate-filled orders for pursuit reached his ears.

CHAPTER VI

Flight of the Gods

JERRY did not pause an instant, but lunged through the darkness among the weird vegetation of the court. A pulsing thought lent wings to his feet. Neena had called hunting with the robots "sport of the Gods!"

The moon was overhead, and everything glowed in a strange blue illumination. Clearly visible ahead was the white tower, and he made for it. There was double reason why he should go there, for he knew now that Orleen would not be safe from Neena's vengeance. The Priestess herself would guess his intent, and the dash to the Temple would resolve into a mad race, with chances about equal. Miles with a head start, Neena with the greater speed of the robots.

Fortunately the distance was not great, and Jerry covered it at top speed, dashing past startled natives in the moonlit dusk. At any moment he expected the mechanical thud of metal feet behind him. The white structure loomed above, and he was plunging across the low porch and into the blackness of the splendid corridor. Up the gentle sweep of the stairs to the ebony floor of the cupola. The beacon-like flare of the Sleeper's casket shone through the gloom.

Pale and beautiful she was, in the warm glow of the light-tube, and for a moment that loveliness held him. Then again he was twisting his bowie knife in the square depression of the golden box—with hasty assurance this time, for somewhere outside in the street came the clatter of multiple metal feet!

The curving transparent lid slid back as before, and renewed life was flowing through the slim figure within. Brown eyes opened to stare into Miles'. In that look was instant understanding. Orleen smiled.

"I knew you would return, Jerry!" came silvery tones. Sudden concern crossed her face; she sat up swiftly. "You're troubled. Something has happened."

"Much!" he replied urgently. "Quick, Orleen, we've got to get out of here. We're in danger, both of us!"

Puzzled alarm showed on her white brow. "I don't understand . . ."

"No time to explain; they're right on my heels, three robots. Hurry!"

In the passageway below sounded harsh staccato of metal on stone. Neena was bringing the robots into the tower!

Jerry scooped up the white-draped form of Orleen from the casket. He placed her quickly on her feet, conscious as he did so, of her supple grace. But even as he led her toward the stairs, sound from the blackness beneath told him the robots were mounting the steps.

He set his jaw. "We're caught," he grated. "Too far to jump from the window, no use to hide, and I can't fight three robots with a dagger!"

SURPRISINGLY, Orleen was tugging on his arm. Her voice an urgent whisper. "I have a way! The people of Iroq do not know this tower as well as they might."

She drew him toward the dusky curve that was the rotunda's wall. As her hand ran for a moment over the figured medallion work, the clatter on the stairway drew near. Then something clicked beneath her touch, and a panel opened, faint radiance showing. Together they ducked in; the door slid silently into place, cutting off outside sound.

It was an oblong little room they were in, pale illumination coming from the walls and ceiling. Cylindrical metal containers were piled in neat array.

"My secret store room," explained Orleen with a little gesture. "Food is here for use during my waking periods."

"Can you leave the tower from here?" demanded Jerry eagerly.

The golden head nodded. "Come . . ."

At her touch an opening appeared in the floor; a tiny spiraling stairway leading downward. She led the way, Miles thumping at her heels. A minute later Orleen halted.

"Sh-h . . ."

A rectangle opened, and the golden girl peered

forth. Then her hand found Jerry's, guided him out. They were in one of the dusk filled curving colonnades of the Temple.

"Come on," whispered Jerry, "we've got to reach the wall before those mechanical bloodhounds get wind of us!"

Silently they slipped through the ghostly gleaming splendor of the arcade, out of the tower and into the deserted streets of Iroq.

Lightly Orleen, daughter of a long forgotten people, ran at his side. No fear disturbed the pale beauty of her features; only calm trust. Indeed, thought Miles, she did not yet know the true gravity of the situation, and he could not bring himself to tell her of Neena's bloody thirst for revenge; that thirst would certainly put the Priestess on their trail again. It was, in fact, a desperate dash for their lives.

Soon the village was behind, the weird masses of the jungle about them. Miles slowed their pace to a trot; balloon-plants dotted the landscape, and there was danger of stumbling into the cruel projecting thorn-pikes. Then too, they'd have to conserve their strength; a final dash might well be the difference between life and death.

Still there was no sign of pursuit.

Evidently Neena still believed they were hid somewhere in the Temple. They reached the crest of a green-carpeted hillock, and Jerry stopped to look back.

They went on again, Orleen silent but uncomplaining at his side. Dull elation was mounting within Jerry. They were half way to the wall.

"Jerry!" gasped Orleen suddenly, tugged him to a halt. Her attitude was of intent listening. Miles turned, cocked his head.

Somewhere in the distance behind them, through the thick blue atmosphere, came the rich voice of Neena lifted in call. And as the blood drained from Jerry's face, a faint *thud thud thud* of pounding metal feet became audible.

MILES and the golden-haired girl sprang into the wild flight of panic. That stomping sound, horribly threatening in its mechanical rhythm, lent strength to their flagging muscles. They ran over the undulant terrain between the thick bubble-capped vegetation. And now the vivid green moss underfoot seemed to clutch at them with greedy malicious fingers.

Orleen stumbled, would have fallen had not Miles caught her. As he held her, the futility of that blind flight struck him. Only half the distance to the wall, and the robots close behind; to win such a race was a stark impossibility.

"No use, Orleen," he gasped. "We'll never make it." He cast a desperate glance about, rested his eye on the pulpy, heavy growths, looked hopelessly at the faintly gleaming bubbles, the huge balloon-plants tugging at brown cable-stalks . . .

The girl was close to him. "We can't hide," she

pointed out. "The robots will scent us."

Jerry's eyes gleamed with frantic speculation as they caught upon the balloon-plants.

"No," he grated, "we can't hide—but we won't have to. Come on!"

Somewhere in the jungle, thumping metal feet were drawing near with unflinching sureness. Jerry hurried the girl toward the nearest balloon-plant. Her eyes were wide with wonder as he made an opening in the plant's thorn barrier by pulling sideways on the radiating shafts. He gestured with his head at the growth's stem.

"Climb it. Quick!"

Orleen looked helplessly at the tawny stalk stretching stiffly upward like a huge rope hanging from a balloon.

"But I . . . how . . . ?"

"Climb it, woman! Your life depends on getting up there!"

Orleen smiled tremulously at him, stepped quickly between the long spear-thorns and began a struggling ascent of the plant's stalk.

Jerry groaned inwardly. Valiant little thoroughbred that she was, she was nevertheless barely inching up the cable—much too slow!

Abruptly he wheeled. Coming around a near clump of vegetation were two of the red robots, the surmounting globes of their bodies catching the moonlight in cold flashes. Behind followed a third, carrying the familiar canopied litter. From it sounded Neena's shout, suddenly exultant. She had seen the fugitives.

But the robots did not spring ruthlessly upon Miles, rather they took positions behind the balloon-plant to prevent his escape. And Jerry saw the reason. The squat form of Borko was hunched forward in the seat beside Neena, a huge sword across his knees!

CHAPTER VII

Balloons of Chance

MILES gritted his teeth. Whacked to pieces without a chance to fight back, eh? Not while he had a brain and two arms! He whipped out his hunting knife, began whittling furiously at the base of one of the spear-thorns; its tough fourfoot length would make an ideal rapier.

The robot had halted with its passengers a short distance away, and Borko, like a grim diabolical gnome in his purple cape, stepped forth. Neena said nothing, did not move; a cruel statue of exotic beauty.

Desperately Jerry cut at the hard stem. Borko stalked forward confidently, huge sword upon his thick shoulder, gloating satisfaction showing in the harsh lines of his face. He chuckled deeply.

"Your roaring weapon kills only for you," he called. "Aye, but I have something that kills for me!"

Brandishing the great sword in both hands, the stocky Administrator bounded forward. Miles

slashed through the pike just in time to meet the rush. Borko swung his weapon ax fashion, its blade descending in a hissing arc. Jerry, still on his knees, got in a short jabbing thrust of his improvised spear. It struck nothing; but Borko's own swing was diverted, and the very violence of that effort nearly impaled him on the balloon-plant's outward projecting spikes.

The dark man gave ground, and Miles sprang to his feet. Borko charged again this time his hewing blade directed at the menace of his opponent's spear. The blow was a glancing one, yet there was such force in it that Jerry's lance was almost ripped from his hands. He recovered on the instant, gave a desperate jab of the spear.

Fatigued as Miles was from his recent flight, there was neither accuracy or power behind that thrust. Nevertheless it caught Borko in the left shoulder.

With a roar of pained rage the man leaped backward, pressed a hand to his shoulder. And that hand came away red with blood. Sudden fear was reflected on the dark face. Miles sought to follow his advantage with a quick jab, and in doing so, found that Borko's wound had not impaired the efficiency of his muscular arm. For he met a blow from the huge sword that whistled within an inch of his face.

But the purple-garbed man's confidence had vanished, Miles could sense; he was fighting now with desperation. And slowly Jerry beat him around until his back was almost touching the out-thrust spikes of the balloon-plant's stalk. Then abruptly Borko's flashing blade caught Jerry's spear dead-center. There was a snapping of fibers and the broken shaft was wrenched from his hands, hurled away.

STUNNED, Miles stood rooted to the ground, his mind refusing to credit what his senses told him was horrible truth.

Instantly Borko's leering bravado flooded back. "Now, infidel," he shouted triumphantly, "you shall see how my weapon kills!" And like a baseball player striking a ball, he swung the ponderous sword.

Had that blow landed it would have cleaved a man in two. It grazed Jerry's shoulder as he ducked. The very power of that wasted effort twisted Borko's body half around, and thus for a moment an opening appeared.

Jerry leaped forward, swinging his fist from the ground in a terrific blow. His knuckles crashed squarely under the man's chin. Borko's stocky form was literally hurled backward and a single death shriek left his lips.

Two of the balloon-plant lances, bloody red, protruded through his chest.

"You are skillful with your fists!" said a throaty mocking voice behind Jerry.

He whirled. Neena sprawled languorously in the cushioned litter. Moonlight shone on the perilous beauty of her face, the taunting curl of her painted lips.

"Skillful, yes," continued the honeyed voice, "but I wonder what your fists will avail you against my robots?"

Miles made no effort to reply. He glanced up at the floating plant overhead where the white form of Orleen was laboriously inching her way upward. Then he was parting the spear-thorns, was shinnying up the cable-stalk after her.

An amused chuckle sounded from below. "Fools! Do you think you are safe there? It will be pleasing to watch you cling until you fall. Or if I grow impatient my metal servants will pull the plant down. . . ."

Jerry climbed swiftly until he was just beneath Orleen. The huge green bag of the plant was a yard above her. He looked down at Neena fifty feet below and he could contain himself no longer. He laughed grimly at her.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Priestess, but we're not staying here!"

And he jerked out his bowie knife, began to cut the tawny anchoring cable beneath him. Instantly Neena grasped his intention. She called to the robots, and her voice was shrill with fury. They lurched forward, one on each side of the plant, their coiling tentacles whipped out, grasped the cable-stalk and began to pull it down like men drawing in rope.

A little gasp sounded from Orleen as the floating plant lunged precariously. With legs folded and clamped around the stalk, and holding meantime with one hand, Jerry sliced away at the tough stem stretching beneath him. But a command from Neena brought increased activity from the robots; their appendages jerking down the plant stalk like the furiously flailing arms of a steam engine.

He could see the Priestess standing intently, as motionless as a bronze figurine, yet he sensed the flaming hatred that burned within her. And directly below, the frantically working tentacles of the robots drawing nearer and nearer—arms that would crush and tear if they chanced to come within reach.

Then abruptly Miles cut through the stalk. Upward surged the balloon-plant carrying its cargo effortlessly; it had in truth become a balloon. Below, the robots and the statuesque form of Iroq's High Priestess were dwindling dots that soon merged into the mottled expanse of the moonlit jungle. In the distance was a pale finger of white pointing silently heavenward. . . .

Later, the man and woman stood upon the wall looking down at the mistiness that was sleeping Iroq. Orleen's golden head was close to Miles' shoulders, and her voice was husky, eager.

"I—I'm glad, Jerry, that we had to leave this—test tube! I'm tired of wandering through the centuries. I want to live a *normal* woman's life!"

For answer Jerry Miles' arm tightened about her shoulders.

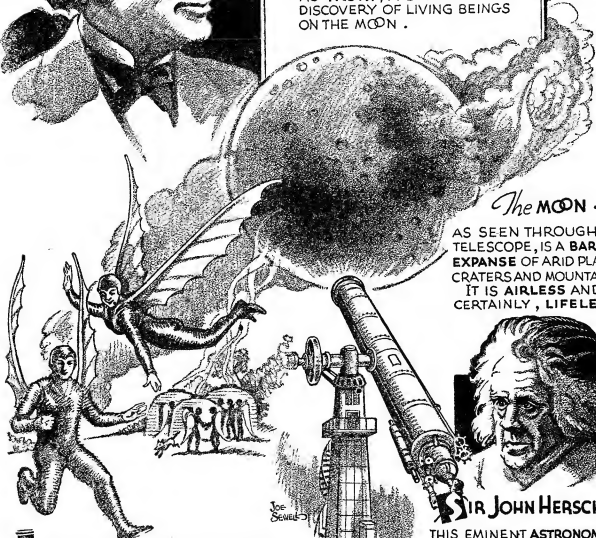
fantastic



RICHARD ADAMS LOCKE

WAS ONE OF THE LEADING-REPORTERS OF AMERICA IN 1835.

BUT HIS REAL CLAIM TO FAME CAME ON AUGUST 21 OF THAT YEAR WHEN HE CONCEIVED THE IDEA OF A GIGANTIC HOAX THAT WAS TO STARTLE AMERICA. HE WROTE, AS TRUTH, A STORY OF THE DISCOVERY OF LIVING BEINGS ON THE MOON.



The MOON . .

AS SEEN THROUGH A TELESCOPE, IS A BARREN EXPANSE OF ARID PLAINS, CRATERS AND MOUNTAINS. IT IS AIRLESS AND CERTAINLY, LIFELESS.



SIR JOHN HERSCHEL

THIS EMINENT ASTRONOMER WAS MADE THE FOCAL POINT OF LOCKE'S HOAX, AND IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE HIS DISCOVERY, MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH HIS INVENTION OF A SUPER-TELESCOPE IN CAPE TOWN. BACKED BY HIS NAME THE PUBLIC ACCEPTED THE ARTICLES AS TRUTH . . .

REGARDLESS OF THE FACT THAT THE MOON HAD ALWAYS BEEN CONSIDERED TO BE A DEAD WORLD, LOCKE PEOPLED IT WITH A RACE OF BEINGS LIVING IN IDYLIC PLEASURE. HE GAVE THEM WINGS, AND FURRY BODIES. THEY LIVED IN SIMPLE HUTS, AND DID NO WORK. LOLLING ABOUT, SWIMMING IN WARM POOLS, EATING-ABUNDANT FRUIT, HE PICTURED THEM AS A UTOPIAN RACE . . .

hoaxes

Science records many fantastic science hoaxes, perpetrated on the gullible public. We present here one of the most famous deceptions.

IN 1835 the New York *Sun* perpetrated one of the most famous hoaxes in history. However, in so doing, its intent was not a mischievous attempt to fool the public; it was not intended to be a profit-making scheme, as are most hoaxes. In fact, the *Sun* itself, actually enacted the role of believer with millions of other gulleless Americans.

On August 21 of that year, there appeared in the *Sun* a short item quoting from the Edinburgh *Courant*, relating very briefly that Sir John Herschel (a very well known astronomer of that period) had just made certain remarkable astronomical discoveries by means of a new tremendous telescope, at his observatory in Cape Town, South Africa. Since Herschel was noted for the advances he had made in the construction of astronomical instruments, such an announcement was not entirely implausible.

On Tuesday, August 25, began a series of seven feature articles concerning these amazing discoveries written by Richard Adams Locke, one of the leading reporters of the day. The information in these articles was credited to the *Edinburgh Journal of Science*. It may be readily seen that these accounts of Herschel's discoveries were false because the *Journal of Science* suspended publication several years previous to this time. But in the United States, nothing was known of this publication, and since the telegraph and undersea cable were unknown, there was no way of proving the falsity of the story, even had it been doubted. The public tacitly accepted the articles as truth.

Locke, the author, who conceived and executed the whole affair entirely by himself, did a wonderfully convincing job. In the first place he beguiled the public with all sorts of technical terms. Then, being a good reporter, he could write very convincingly, and refrained from exceeding the bounds of the public's credulity. Every point of the story could have been true. To make his statements more believable, he accompanied them with drawings, supposedly made in the observatory by Herschel himself.

The account began by relating the story of Herschel's researches in optics and went on to describe how he had, after many failures, come upon a formula for glass which would make a lens of any desired strength.

The construction of the giant lens was given in great detail, and was quite correct, too, resulting in the stilling of numerous unbelievers and scoffers. Then came an excellent and extremely interesting description of the moon, its flora, fauna and topographical details.

The moon was inhabited, Locke said, by all sorts of beings. There was abundant vegetation covering large portions of the satellite, animals were numerous, and while many resembled earthly fauna, others had no earthly counterparts. But most interesting of all were the human-like beings also detected by the Herschel telescope.

These creatures, male and female, as on earth, were possessed of the advantage of being winged, their wings being somewhat like those of bats. These wings were not covered by hair or fur although the remainder of the bodies of both sexes were clothed in fur. They wore no clothes and appeared to be simple and primitive in their customs and organization. They lived in small groups and were not permanently located even then, since members of one group often wandered to others. It could not be determined whether they had political, social or religious organization.

Their habitations were the only artificial things on the moon, being crudely constructed huts of a bamboo-like material.

The moon beings possessed the knowledge of fire, for smoke was often seen pouring from holes in the roofs of the huts. Weapons seemingly were unknown for none were ever seen. Their food seemed to consist of the various fruits which grew plentifully about them.

Life on the moon was simple and pleasant, and probably happy as described by Locke. The various groups were at peace with each other, there were no dangerous animals, food was to be had without effort at all times, and thus, these people spent most of their time lolling about, swimming in the many lakes and rivers, wandering about their world, and in long discussions which lasted several days.

Locke made his sole error in the description of the lens. "So powerful is it," he said, "that when the sun's rays were concentrated through it, a whole line of trees was set afire." Any rank amateur ought to know that a lens concentrates rays in a point, and not in a line as the above statement implies. But an enthusiastic public either ignored or failed to notice this error.

The denouement was swift and complete. A week after the beginning of the series of articles the *Journal of Commerce* decided to reprint it. News of their intentions reached Locke, who advised them not to do so as the story was a hoax. The secret was out in less time than it takes to tell.

Locke admitted that he had gotten the idea for the whole affair from one Dr. Dick, who had previously published a work on means of communicating with the moon. He also stated that he had no accomplice except the editor of the paper who had permitted the printing of the articles. If what he says is true, we must rank Locke with the leading fantasy authors. The Moon Hoax was one of the greatest products of the human mind in the direction of fantasy. And, although the hoax itself lasted only a few days, it lingered for several years in stage versions which were presented everywhere. Even today it causes a quiet laugh at the expense of the credulous people who believed Mr. Locke. Simpletons indeed, to believe all this could have been seen through a telescope!

But are the people of today less credulous? We wonder.



Two priests bore the girl's limp body up the pyramid stairs of the bull god

Adventure in LEMURIA

BY
FREDERICK
ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.

CHAPTER I Battle in the Grove

KHOR strode easily along the broad highway, the sunlight gleaming on the bronze shield between his shoulders, the massive double headed axe dangling from his belt.

On either side of the highway lay pleasantly shady groves, nestling between the basalt cliffs. Clusters of trees, orange, pomegranate, banyan—flowers, trailing jasmine, brilliant hibiscus, and the sacred lotus, filling the air with a heavy breath-taking scent.

Glancing about, Khor nodded approvingly. A pleasant place, this land of Mu. One in which a man might readily make his home, live in content. Most men, that is. For Khor, whom they called the Wanderer, knew no rest; the promise of the horizon drew him on, endlessly, seeking he knew not what.

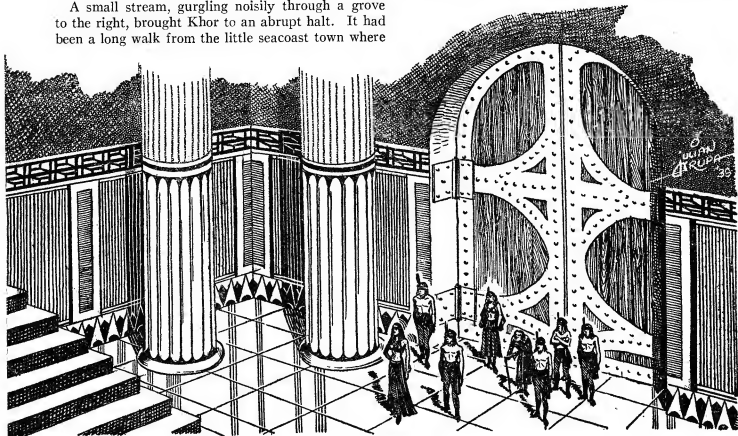
A small stream, gurgling noisily through a grove to the right, brought Khor to an abrupt halt. It had been a long walk from the little seacoast town where

To the land of Mu came Khor, The Wanderer, to defy Lalath, Queen of Lemuria, and her demon god, Molech, whose breath was death

the galley landed. Perhaps a rest, and a taste of those tempting golden fruits. . . . Leaving the highway, he entered the grove.

Khor was just bending over the brook when he heard it . . . shouts, the cries of warriors, and a clash of swords on armor. Tossing back his long, fair hair, he straightened up, the light of battle in his eyes. Hastily he slipped his left arm through the leathern thongs of his shield, gripped the heavy axe with his right, and raced in the direction of the clamor.

For just a moment, as Khor burst from the clump of trees, he hesitated, taking in the scene before him. On the grassy glade that lay between the frowning cliffs and the grove, a group of struggling figures was



man clad . . . one of them, a slender dark-haired young man visible in a blue mantle . . . and the other four, warriors in gleaming gilded armor, squat swarthy men, their faces aglow with fierce exultation.

Some half dozen sprawling forms stretched upon the ground attested to the bitterness of the fray, and it seemed that another must soon lie there, for the slender young man, already marked by a score of wounds, was weakening under the assault of the four warriors.

Khor marveled at the skill with which the youth, armed only with a light hunting sword, defended himself against the four flashing blades; yet it was evident that his was a losing battle, that the men in the golden armor were intent upon keeping him occupied until loss of blood and exhaustion would cause him to drop, an easy victim, at their feet.

It was this latter fact that decided Khor. Brave men, he felt, would fight to kill . . . but this wearing out of an opponent and then slitting his throat at one's leisure was the work of cowards. Grimly he raised the burnished bronze axe, and, with a shout of encouragement to the man in the blue mantle, sprang from the shadow of the trees.

At the sound of Khor's voice the little dark men whirled about, their faces blank with amazement. A god, he seemed to them, with his yellow hair, his white skin; and though not considered overly tall in his homeland of Crete, Khor's six-foot frame, lithe and clean-limbed, towered a full head above them.

God or man, however, the axe in his hand gleamed ominously, and, leaving one of their number to occupy the blue-clad youth, the three remaining warriors turned to face this new antagonist.

WITH a quick leap Khor was upon them, grinning recklessly over the top of his round bronze shield. As he closed in, two of his opponents' curiously twisted swords licked out toward his chest, forcing him to keep his shield high. The third, bending low, loosed a slashing stroke at Khor's unprotected legs.

"By Ishtar!" Khor cried, leaping backward to avoid the blow. "A cowardly trick!"

And before the crouching warrior could straighten up, the great bronze axe had descended, whistling, with all the strength of Khor's powerful arm behind it. Through golden helm and bone the bronze blade sheared, splitting the man's head so that it fell apart like the two halves of a nut. Before Khor could raise the axe again, however, the other two were upon him, sunlight gleaming brightly on their lifted swords.

Acting instinctively, the Cretan swung his left arm wide. The heavy shield with its snarling lion's head in the center crashed into one of the gold-clad warriors, sent him sprawling, his face a bloody mask.

The last of the three Murians, seeing Khor thus unguarded, plunged forward, meaning to run him through with the point. As, arm extended, he hurled toward Khor, the Cretan swung the double headed axe once

more, swung it upward from its resting place in the skull of the first warrior. In a slithering arc the keen-edged weapon whirled up, slicing through the Murian's forearm cleanly, lopping it off at the wrist. For just a moment the brown-skinned little man remained erect, staring at his own hand, still clutching the gold-embossed sword hilt, on the ground at his feet. Then, eyes glazed, he pitched face down to the grass.

"By the Sacred Altar of Minos!" Khor panted. "These little brown devils can fight!"

Suddenly remembering the man in the blue mantle, he turned to go to his assistance. The slender youth was on one knee, defending himself desperately against his black-browed, hot-eyed opponent.

"But a moment!" Khor cried, racing toward him. "I . . ."

He broke off, staring in open-mouthed admiration. The man in the blue mantle, bleeding from a dozen wounds, panting with exhaustion, had surged once more to his feet and, by a supreme effort of will, struck the sword from his enemy's hand. Disarmed, frightened by the sight of Khor bearing down upon him, the last of the gold-clad warriors took to his heels.

"AIE!" The youth in the blue mantle leaned, panting, upon his sword, staring sadly at the sprawling figures that littered the grove. Then, glancing up at Khor, "I, myself, must have joined them had the gods not sent you, stranger, to succor me. Are you indeed earthborn?"

Khor, wiping the great axe with a tuft of grass, laughed. When he spoke, it was in the liquid tongue of Mu that the merchants aboard the galley had taught him during the long voyage from Sathan, on the shore of Ind.

"Khor the Wanderer, men call me," he said. "From the land of Crete in the Upper Sea, I come. For more than a hundred moons have I traveled east. And now I have reached this land of Mu, called by travelers the home of the gods. Are you of the people of Mu?"

"Aye!" The slender youth threw back his head. "Jador, I am called, ruler of Zac, which is part of the great nation of Lemuria . . . Mu."

"A prince!" Khor grinned ironically, glancing at the bodies of the gold-clad warriors. "And these . . . ?"

"Followers of my half-sister, Lalath." The youth's face darkened. "Five years since, when I was still a child, she seized the throne of Zac. Only through the loyalty of my guard was I able to escape. Five years in hiding, I spent, and now, having come of age, I seek to regain my throne, re-establish the worship of Narayama, the true god, in place of bloody Molech. Today, accompanied by a few loyal retainers, I came here to await the arrival of those who espouse my cause, peasants, merchants, nobles, all sworn to assemble here during the night, attack the city tomorrow. By mischance we encountered a patrol of Lalath's warriors . . . and the rest you know."

Khor nodded his blue eyes on the great city that

lay in the valley below. Towers, white as ivory, thrust like lances at the sky; stately buildings, brilliant gardens, gleaming lakes, all encompassed by frowning grey walls which seemed to Khor wide enough for chariots to ride upon, two abreast.

"No handful of rebels will take that town against well-trained warriors," he muttered. "Mighty engines of war, aye, and twice ten thousand men would find it hard. Madness, lad, for you to dream of winning it."

The young man squared his shoulders, and in spite of his ragged, bloodstained garments, he seemed a strong, commanding figure.

"Narayama the true god shall aid us," he said proudly. "In these hills above us lies the secret tomb of my ancestors, mighty rulers of Zac. There I shall pray to the Eternal One for guidance." He stretched out his hand, touched the Cretan's right shoulder in the Murian gesture of greeting or farewell. "When I return to the throne of Zac, you will be rewarded. Thanks and may the gods keep you."

TURNING, Jador crossed the glade, commenced to ascend a rocky path cut into the dark, basalt cliffs. Khor watched him, swaying with weakness, clutching at projecting rocks, gnarled shrubs, in an effort to drag himself upward.

"Stay!" The Cretan ran lightly, sure-footed as a mountain goat, up the path. "You think to climb these cliffs with half your blood spilled in battle? Here, lad, take my arm!"

Gasping, Jador grasped Khor's muscular elbow.

"Surely you must have been sent by the true gods," he muttered. "The way to our mountain abode is not one for a wounded man . . . alone."

Upward, ever upward, the path wound, no more than a tiny ledge cut zig-zag in the face of the cliffs. Khor, all but carrying the youth, was panting now, his face damp with sweat.

At length, after what seemed hours of toil, the path widened to a small shelf, some ten feet square. Before them at the face of the cliff was a great disc of stone, higher than a man's head.

"Push it aside," Jador whispered.

Khor placed his shoulder against the rim of the disc, threw his weight upon it. Moving easily in a groove cut for that purpose, the disc rolled to one side.

The entrance, overlooking the vast city ruled by Jador's half-sister led to Jador's place of refuge. What mysteries lay beyond, what loyal forces remained there to restore Jador to his kingdom, Khor was not to discover. For Jador, extending his hand in the Lemurian gesture of thanks, bade farewell to his new-found friend.

After the ceremony of farewells, Jador stepped out onto the shelf of rock, stared at the marble spires of the city in the distance. "See, Khor, that rocky pinnacle in the heart of the city? Upon its summit Lalath has built an altar to Molech the Bull God, the Evil One. There, it is said, the breath of Molech drives men to madness, to death! We shall strike for it first to-

morrow, destroy the temple! Thus with Molech overthrown, we shall, by Narayama's word, conquer!"

"Perhaps," Khor grunted, his composure restored by the sunlight, the clean air of the mountains. "Yet rather would I have a thousand bold warriors than your god's prophecy, for all his strength! It comes to me, Jador, that I, a stranger, and therefore not to be suspected, might enter the city and at the appointed hour fall upon the guards of some postern gate, open it to admit your armies."

"A cunning plan!" The young prince's face lit up. "But no . . . such an attempt must surely fail. Six warriors guard each of the lesser gates. Even one with your strength and courage . . ."

Khor grinned, shook the double headed axe in grim anticipation.

"You have but to name the gate," he said. "That little affair in the clearing just now has whetted my appetite for a real struggle. Heklos here" . . . he caressed the weapon lovingly . . . "grows dull from lack of use. Which gate, Jador, ruler of Zac?"

"You will do this, then?" The young prince's eyes turned searchingly to Khor's rugged, clean-cut face. "Why do you, an outlander from the west, risk your life for an unknown fugitive?"

Khor pondered a while in silence, frowning thoughtfully.

"Because I like you," he said at length. "Perhaps I do but follow my destiny." He glanced down the rocky path. "You can reach the bottom unassisted?"

Jador nodded.

"The north postern gate," he said. "At the hour of the rising sun. Narayama watch over you, Khor the Wanderer!"

"Aye," Khor grunted. "We shall be there—Heklos and I!"

CHAPTER II

Lalath

IT was close to sunset when Khor passed through the main gate of Zac. Towering above the throng of merchants, mendicants, and pilgrims who sought entrance to the city before nightfall, he made a powerful, imposing figure. On all sides there were curious glances, exclamations at his height, his fair yellow hair, his white skin. Oblivious, the Cretan strode on, intent only on reaching the northern gate studying its defenses for the morrow's assault.

The city, Khor noticed, far surpassed any other he had observed in his travels, even many-walled Ur, or the mighty capital of Chin. Everywhere were majestic buildings of black and white marble, gaily decorated with striped awnings, roof-gardens ablaze with flowers.

Khor had not proceeded far into the city before he became aware that it was a feast day of some sort. Merchants in the bazaars had their most priceless gifts displayed. The streets were thronged with

priests, pompous merchants, and flower girls strewing the pavements with lotus blooms. On all sides were warriors of the witch-queen's guard, resplendent in their golden armor, and nobles, dashing back and forth in brazen chariots, contemptuous of the commoners who fled to escape the thundering hoofs, the grinding wheels.

Yet in spite of all this panoply and pageant-like splendor, the Cretan detected another note. The muttered oaths that ran in the wake of a glittering guardsman, the dark looks, half-anger, half-fear, that followed the passage of a jewel-bedecked priest or noble. Khor smiled. Perhaps Jador would not have such hard work after all. . . . Turning to an ancient white-bearded man beside him, he nodded.

"Your pardon, father. I am a stranger from the west. What festival do you of Zac celebrate?"

"Festival?" The old man turned bitter eyes to the Cretan. "Lalath, the witch-queen, sacrifices tonight to Molech the Evil One. Twelve of our fairest youths to face the bulls of the temple. Yes, and those who survive are doomed to die from the poisonous breath of Molech at dawn."

"Eh?" Khor frowned. "As for facing bulls, we of Minos, in the land of Crete, know somewhat. Aye, none better. But these tales of a god whose breath alone can slay. . . ."

"Quiet, then, lest you discover for yourself." The old man, seeing a gold-armored warrior approach, disappeared into the crowd. Khor was about to follow when he heard a shout behind him.

"Mighty Molech!" A deep voice roared. "It is he! The white-skinned stranger who saved the life of that dog Jador! Hold him!"

KHOR whirled, found himself face to face with the black-browed warrior who had escaped the morning's fray. Leaping backward, the Cretan snatched his shield from between his shoulders, drew from his belt the double-headed axe.

The first blow from Khor's massive weapon split the guardsman's copper shield like a lath of wood. Casting aside the useless buckler, the Murian advanced warily, keeping beyond reach of the deadly axe, striving to get in a telling blow at the Cretan's exposed head and legs. The noise of the fray, the guardsman's shouts, quickly attracted others of his kind. Two, three, a dozen of the golden warriors were crowding about the tall stranger. Khor, his back against a stout marble wall, swung his axe in sweeping circles, keeping them back. One, advancing overclose for a thrust at Khor's side, stepped into the path of the blade. With a crunch the weapon bit through his ornamental armor, laid bare his thigh. Another warrior, taking advantage of his opening, leaped forward, only to retreat once more as a back-handed blow slashed a bloody furrow across his chest.

And still the Cretan, by skillful use of his brazen shield, remained untouched. Though not wounded, his breath was beginning to come in gasps,

his face to gleam with sweat. Realizing that his strength must sooner or later fail, he sprang to the attack, hoping to cut his way through to freedom. Once, twice, three times the blood-stained axe descended, and three Murians toppled to the ground. The others, staring in amazement at this berzerk stranger, drew back, afraid.

"Slingers!" someone shouted. "Quickly! He must be taken alive for the queen's sacrifice! An offering to Molech!"

Hearing this, Khor pressed forward desperately, but the Murian warriors gave ground before him, yet keeping him occupied with their curved swords. The Cretan's heart was pumping heavily, now, his muscles aching. Dimly, through sweat-blinded eyes, he saw stocky, brown-skinned men approaching, whirling thongs of leather about their heads. With an instinctive gesture he flung up his shield, but it was too late. Something hard crashed against his temple and the world dissolved into mist.

THE great amphitheater of Zac, sprawling at the base of the crag upon which the black temple of Molech stood, was ablaze with a thousand cressets. Ruddy flame-light glittered upon tier after tier of tessellated marble. High at one end of the arena jeweled lamps marked the queen's dais, a raised platform of carved sandalwood hung with silken draperies, cloth of gold.

Suddenly the door at the end of the arena swung open and a stocky, swarthy youth stepped into the torches' glare. Clad only in a breech-clout, unarmed, he seemed pitifully small against the background of eager, grinning faces. As the youth advanced toward the center of the amphitheater, another door swung wide and a great black bull, one of those sacred to Molech, thundered into the arena. Scourged and goaded into fury, his nostrils dilated, his mouth dripping foam, the huge beast circled the field, snorting, pawing at the ground. All at once, catching sight of the swarthy youth, he lowered his head, charged.

In vain the young man tried to step aside, avoid the gilded horns. A quick toss of the bull's head, and the youth, a gored and bloody figure, was hurled across the field. Savagely the bull turned, trampled his opponent into a crimson pulp.

On her couch of purple ostrich feathers Lalath, queen of Zac, stifled a yawn. Her huge opalescent eyes were apathetic and she twisted her lithe, near-nude body restlessly.

"See, Hatan," she murmured to the resplendent captain who stood beside her. "Another victory for the sacred bull. Have we none among our captives who will give us sport?"

"Perhaps, majesty," the bedizened captain murmured. "There is one, an outlander from the west, whom we took but a few hours since. A man of great height, mighty strength. . . ."

"Let him be brought into the arena, then." Lalath smiled eagerly. "At once, Hatan! My people cry for

action, for one who will tax the strength of the sacred bull, before his entrails trail in the dust!"

Hatan bowed, spoke to a crouching Nubian slave. A few moments later the brazen doors at the end of the amphitheater again swung open and a tall powerful figure strode across the sanded field. The ruddy light of the cressets struck gold from his fair hair and as he walked, lithe muscles rippled like water beneath his white skin.

"So, Hatan!" Lalath leaned forward, wetting her scarlet lips in anticipation. "You have done well! Here, indeed, is one to give us sport!"

In the center of the arena Khor cast a quick glance at the tiers of expectant faces, wheeled about as hooves rumbled behind him. Head lowered, the grey-eyed bull bore down upon him.

A grim smile passed over the Cretan's features. Arms extended, knees flexed, he waited. Nearer and nearer the snorting black beast came. A choked silence fell over the crowd. Was this outlander mad? Did he hope to meet the charge of an infuriated bull head-on? Lalath stood up, with a sweep of silken robes.

"Fool!" she whispered. "Does he seek death, hoping to cheat us of our pleasure. . . ."

THE queen's voice trailed off in an indistinguishable murmur, drowned by the roar of the spectators. The Cretan, with a swift, unerring movement, had grasped the lowered horns with his two hands, vaulted lightly upward in a swinging somersault. His body described an arc through the air, his feet struck the bull's back lightly, and an instant later he had leaped to the ground. Breathing easily, hands on hips, he stood behind the onrushing bull.

"Mighty Molech!" Lalath stood like an ivory image, her hands pressed to her breasts. "Never has mortal eye beheld the like! See, the bull turns for a second charge!"

Wheeling, the black monster hurtled toward Khor, its hooves drumming the packed sand. Once more the Cretan seized those blood-stained horns, swung gracefully over the beast's back. Again the bull charged, and again . . . and always Khor's skill enabled him to avoid the deadly horns. Long moments passed and a tense silence fell over the crowd. The bull was growing exhausted now, yet in a frenzy of frustrated rage he kept up his attacks on the elusive Cretan.

At length there came a time when Khor did not leap from the beast's path. Crouching, he waited until the weary animal was upon him, seized the gory horns once more. Then, throwing his weight to one side, his great muscles standing out like taut ropes, he twisted the bull's head. Panting, utterly worn out, the beast rolled over in the dust, lay, tamed, at the Cretan's feet.

A roar of approbation shook the amphitheater. Priests, alarmed by the downfall of the sacred bull, dispatched messengers to the queen's dais, demanding the life of the stranger. These Lalath waved aside as



A grim smile passed over the Cretan's features as he awaited the charging black bull

she spoke to Hatan.

"Fetch me the stranger here," she commanded. "At once!" And a slow, sphinx-like smile upon her vivid face, she twined a lotus blossom in her dark, glossy hair.

Shoulders squared, head high, Khor followed the resplendent Hatan up the carpeted steps to the queen's dais. Lalath, lying back upon her silken couch, studied him from beneath veiled eyelids.

"Who are you?" she murmured. "Never have I seen a man of such strength and cunning, nor yet one whose hair was like gold, skin like unto polished marble, and eyes the color of distant mountains."

"Khor the Wanderer, men call me," he replied. "In my home at Minos, on the island of Crete, we joust with bulls for sport."

"Khor," Lalath repeated. "The name becomes

you." She turned, whispered to the handmaidens who stood behind her couch.

At once they arose, left the dais. Heavy curtains fell from the carved sandalwood roof above, so that Lalath and Khor were shut off from the crowds about them, alone.

Khor, standing like a pale sculpture at the foot of the couch, stared narrowly at the witch-queen. Slender, she was, her sleek body glowing like old ivory in the light of the jeweled lamps. Her blue cloak lay in folds upon the floor, so that her only garment was a golden girdle clasped about her thighs. Her breasts, firm and up-tilted, rose and fell slowly with her deep breathing. Her scarlet lips were slightly parted and her fingers on Khor's arm as soft as rose petals.

Suddenly Lalath raised her eyes, black as a tropic night, to Khor's face. Like lodestone they drew him nearer and nearer. Now he could feel her body tense against his, her hot breath upon his cheek. And those huge dark eyes, twin pools of Lethe, bringing forgetfulness. . . .

All at once fear swept over Khor. Bottomless, the queen's eyes seemed, pits of evil, haunted by the demons of hell. Dim eldritch mysteries, unspeakable thoughts, monstrous, vampire-like longings, lurked in their depths. Revulsion, a feeling of uncleanness gripped the Cretan. Roughly he broke away from those clinging arms, sprang to his feet.

"Khor!" Lalath whispered. "What is it? See . . . am I not desirable? Do my caresses fail to please? Come. . . ."

"Nay." Khor laughed harshly. "Sooner would I take an adder to my breast. They are right who call you the witch-queen!"

With these words a terrible change came upon Lalath. Face contorted, eyes blazing with fury, she leaped to her feet.

"Hatan!" she cried hoarsely. "Guards!"

Khor stared at her, stunned by the sight of her demoniacal, distorted features. Hatan, followed by three guards, brushed through the purple curtains.

"So, Hatan" . . . the queen spoke with cold menace, ice, where a moment before she had been fire. . . . "this outlander finds my arms unwelcome! Perhaps the arms of Molech may console him. Tell the priests of the temple that I shall be present at the dawn sacrifice to see him die!"

"She-devil!" Khor lunged forward, seeking that soft throat with grasping fingers. Hatan and the three guards seized him, dragged him, struggling, from the pavilion. And as, stunned by their savage blows, Khor stumbled down the broad steps, he seemed to see the face of Lalath, smiling mockingly at him.

CHAPTER III

The Bull God

THE rocky cell beneath the temple was dark, damp. Khor paced restlessly back and forth, straining at

the leathern thongs which bound his wrists. Somehow it was impossible to drive the thought of Jador, gallant young prince of Zac, from his mind. Boastfully he had promised Jador that he would open the northern gate. And Jador, believing in him, would count upon that gate's being unbarred.

Had he, Khor, fulfilled his mission, it would have been easy. A sudden entrance through the undefended postern, taking the queen's guards by surprise, freeing, arming the people. But now . . . Khor shook his head drearily.

Finding the gate barred they would be forced to retreat, seek scaling ladders, ropes. And by the time these were collected, the city's garrison would be fully aroused, the walls strongly manned.

Khor glanced through the tiny grating of the window. False dawn paled the eastern sky. Already Jador and his followers would be assembled at the tomb of the kings, marching toward the city. At any rate he, Khor, would not be alive to see their defeat. Death, on the altar of Molech. . . . A sorry way for a warrior to die. Perhaps, had he not repulsed Lalath . . . Khor shook his head once more, at memory of the witch-queen's luminous, hypnotic eyes. Better the breath of Molech than . . .

Soft, shuffling footsteps in the hallway outside, the creaking of a drawn bolt. Slowly the ponderous door swung open. Three priests, lean, wrinkled vultures, stood on the threshold, their sable robes giving them the appearance of bodiless spectres in the gloom.

"Come." The leader of the three, he with the jade and silver headdress, motioned Khor forward with a wave of his long sacrificial knife.

Upward, along stone steps, they advanced. Cressets, set at regular intervals along the way, shone glassily upon wet, slimy walls. As they ascended, more groups joined them, those other unfortunates doomed to die upon Molech's altar, accompanied by their guard of black-robed priests. Here, a young girl, slim, lovely; here, an old man, grey, bent; a fat, quaking merchant, a weeping child . . . Impotent rage gripped the Cretan. If only he had not failed Jador. . . .

Ahead they could hear the sound of music, a throbbing, ominous chant filled with tortured wails, the macabre cadence of death. Louder and louder, approaching a furious crescendo, a cry of blood-lust.

Instinctively the priests quickened their steps, eyes glowing. Jeweled curtains at the end of the corridor drew back as they approached. Urged forward at the point of the sacrificial knives, the captives stumbled through the entrance.

Rows of sable-clad worshippers lined the sides of the temple, chanting their fierce melody, exultant. In the center of the vast hall a pyramid rose, thrusting into the shadows of the ceiling. Atop the pyramid sat a figure, awe-inspiring, terrible. Thrice human size, it was, the body that of a man, the head, bloated, bestial, obscene, that of a bull. Ghastly, inhuman, the face of Molech, its bovine lips half-parted, its eyes

wild, lustful. At sight of the image, a wail of horror broke from the wretched captives.

SUDDENLY a figure kneeling at the foot of the pyramid arose, faced the line of human sacrifices. Lalath, clad in the sombre robes of high priestess, her blood-red lips set in a satanic smile. Cruel, deep, eyes swept the row of captives, resting a moment, mockingly, on Khor. Then her hand shot out indicating the slim girl beside him. Immediately two priests, braziers of burning incense in their hands, stepped forward, seized the girl, dragged her before Lalath. Laughing harshly, the queen lashed the girl's feet, motioned toward the grinning statue of Molech.

The two priests set down their braziers of incense and, picking up the half-conscious girl, commenced to climb the pyramid. Khor, unable to tear his eyes away, followed their ascent with morbid fascination.

Now the priests were at the top of the pyramid, working in haste as though afraid. Upon the open hands of Molech, outstretched beneath his grinning lips, the girl's slender figure was placed. Quickly the priests descended.

Khor stared at the girl, her frightened, colorless face upturned to the parted lips of the idol. What was it they said about the breath of Molech? Yet the girl seemed in no way harmed, lying passively on the huge hands, her eyes on the distorted countenance above. All at once he saw her stir, restlessly.

Words issued from her lips, strange, incoherent words, spoken in a thick, unnatural voice. Babbings, the ravings of an empty mind. The girl was squirming, writhing about, now, eyes glazed, nostrils dilated. Suddenly she began to gasp, her face black. Panting, choking, she fought against the strange force that was tearing her soul from her body. Then, abruptly, the struggle ceased. Limp, motionless, she lay in the giant hands, her slender form drained of life. And above her the cruel bull-god, its stone lips set in savage ecstasy. . . .

Watching, Khor felt the hair at the back of his neck stiffen. Yet somewhere, he was sure, he had seen a similar occurrence. Somewhere . . . why did the explanation elude him? Was it in Syric . . . or Mayaban? . . .

Now the priests were ascending the steps of the pyramid, removing the girl's body from the clutching stone hands. Again Lalath's gold-flecked eyes swept the line of victims and this time her finger pointed to Khor. Two more dark figures advanced, swinging their glowing braziers. They seized Khor, dragged him before Lalath.

"So, my Khor." The queen's voice was like poisoned wine. "You may now know which is sweeter, my breath or that of Molech." Then, to the priests, "Bind his feet well, that he may not leap from the Arms of Death."

As they bent to lash his ankles, Khor tensed his muscles. Better a struggle, death from the sacrificial knives, than the foul breath of the Bull God. The

Cretan tossed back his fair hair, laughed exultantly. Now . . .

A sound of trumpets, the shouts of warriors in the city below froze Khor to immobility. Jador, attacking! Believing that the northern gate was free! Not knowing of his . . . Khor's . . . failure!

SUDDEN tumult, cries of alarm, swept the great hall. Priests and captives alike turned to gaze between the black columns, view the spectacle below. From the slopes at the north of the city a small army was approaching, racing toward the postern gate. A rabble of peasants, for the most part, armed with scythes, knives, clubs. At their head was a slender figure in a blue cloak. Faint shouts of "Jador!" and "Narayama!" echoed from the plain.

Now Jador and his band were before the northern gate. Springing forward, the young prince threw his weight upon the bronze door, but it did not yield. A cry of dismay arose from his followers. Watching, Khor ground his teeth in helpless rage. Within the city gold-armored figures were streaming toward the walls, the morning sun flashing upon their helmets, their shields. Arrows, spears, huge stones cast by mighty engines of war were cutting swaths in the ranks of the attackers.

In desperation Jador and his band hammered upon the gate with sword and axe, sought to scale the walls. Half their number had by now fallen before the rain of missiles from the walls, and the remainder were beginning to waver. Behind the gate the queen's charioteers waited, reining in their snorting horned steeds. Once the rebels commenced to retreat they would issue forth, cut down the fleeing remnants.

"Ah!" Lalath, watching with avid eyes, laughed. "None shall escape! The Cretan shall be a victory offering to mighty Molech."

Khor, straining at his bonds, gazed hopelessly at the struggle below. Brave, these furious assaults, but futile. So before the walls of Troy had the men of Hellas . . . Khor straightened up suddenly. Hellas! That was what he had been trying to think of! The temple at Delphi, where a strange invisible vapor issued from a cleft in the rocks, to drug the minds of the priestesses! And fire had been forbidden in the temple. . . . What if there were such a cleft beneath the statue of Molech! *

* Delphi, an ancient town in Greece, was celebrated for its oracle of Apollo. The temple of the oracle was situated on the southern slope of Mt. Parnassus. From underground caverns came cold vapors and the region is liable to violent shocks from earthquakes. The oracle took many forms, from the whispering of the laurel leaves, to Pythia, at first a maiden, then a woman over 50 years old garbed as a maiden, who drank from the holy spring, and then sat in the inner shrine, called the adytum. Her drugged utterances were taken down, and put into hexameters by poets attached to the temple. The oracle was consulted by states, and kings in matters of political policy, by private persons in personal matters, such as voyages, business venture, marriage, and other details of daily life. Thus it was that volcanic gases had quite a bit to do with the destiny and the lives of the people of ancient Greece.

Undoubtedly the gases of the god, Molech, were much more poisonous than those at Delphi, and also more inflammable.—Ed.

"Gods of Crete!" Khor muttered. "I have it! Give me strength!" And with one herculean effort he snipped the leather thongs that bound his wrists, his feet.

All eyes were on the battle below, none watching him. Swiftly he snatched up one of the braziers of flaming incense, raced up the steps of the pyramid. Higher, ever higher, into the swirling shadows that cloaked the roof of the temple.

Now there were shouts from the priests, and a knife clattered against the stone beside him. Too late . . . the Cretan was already at the base of the huge image. Quickly drawing back his arm, Khor hurled the brazier of incense straight into the open, grinning mouth of Molech!

AS to what happened next, Khor was never quite certain. A sheet of flame blinded him and the temple rocked like a ship at sea. Sliding, rolling, he fell from the pyramid, landed, half-stunned, on the marble floor below. On all sides the priests of Molech, mad with fear, were attempting to escape to the city below. Khor picked himself up, glanced about. Great sections of the roof were breaking loose, the black pillars beginning to crumble. The Bull God was enveloped in a roaring fountain of flame and vague rumblings sounded in the earth below.

As in a dream Khor saw Lalath, her lips parted in a bestial snarl, pluck a knife from her girdle, draw back a slender arm. Before she could hurl the weapon, another tremor shook the temple and the huge seated figure atop the pyramid rocked, toppled from its base. A scream of terror broke from Lalath's throat; instinctively, as though to ward off the tons of falling stone, she threw up an arm. One glimpse of that vivid diabolically beautiful face Khor had, before it was buried beneath the grinning bull-like idol.

Choking in the dust, the Cretan remembered stumbled from the temple, then raced down the steps cut in the rocky crag. Chaos gripped the city below. Buildings, monuments, shaken into heaps of rubble; great fissures, spouting smoke and flame, gaping in the streets. The earth shook. To the north where Jador and his men watched with awe-filled eyes, huge sections of the city wall collapsed in heaps of ruin.

Now Khor was in the streets of the town, fighting his way through the maddened crowds. Rocks, stones, fell everywhere; through the pall of smoke above the crag a pillar of fire thrust like a blazing brand at the

heavens. Cries of terror arose on all sides. "Molech has fallen!" "Mighty Molech is no more!" Suddenly a roar of ear-splitting violence shook the streets, hurled the Cretan against the side of a house. Glancing back, he saw the dark pinnacle fly into fragments!

For seven awful minutes the earth heaved and tossed, cracked wide to belch molten stone, and then the pillar of flame was choked out by masses of shattered rock, the subterranean rumbling ceased, and the ground was still. Khor rubbed the dust from his eyes. Ahead he could hear the triumphant shouts of Jador and his men.

"Narayama has spoken! The True Gods have destroyed Molech, breached the walls of the city! The prophecy of the tombs is fulfilled! Hail Jador, beloved of the Gods!" And in joyful answer the people took up the shout, "Hail Jador! Hail Narayama!"

The Cretan, pushing his way to the fore, grinned. Let Jador's gods receive the credit for all that had occurred; it would increase the young king's prestige. People preferred miracles to explanations anyhow. Still grinning, the Cretan advanced toward the king.

"Khor!" Jador's eyes widened. "Now truly are you favored of the gods! They told me you died in Molech's arms! See" . . . he pointed to a bronze axe and shield lying at his feet. "These we found among the trophies of the witch-queen's guards. I had ordered them hung in the Hall of Heroes!"

"Nay!" Khor gripped the axe and shield joyously. "The Wanderer has yet to make his last journey!" Eyes aglow, he faced the rising sun. "Too long has the dust and dirt of city streets clogged my nostrils! The blue line of the horizon calls. . . ."

"You will not then remain?" Jador's smile was sad. No honors, no wealth, will hold you?"

"None." Khor's gaze was on dim distant hills. "Not even my love for you, lad!"

"Thus I gain a kingdom and lose a friend," Jador murmured. "The gods watch over you, Khor the Wanderer!"

"Aye!" Khor gripped the boy's shoulder. "Hail and farewell, Jador, King of Zac!"

Turning, he strode from the square. Already, although he had not yet reached the boundaries of the city, Zac, Jador, Lalath, were things of the past; his fierce blue eyes were bright with dreams of new lands, new people, new adventure. Breathing deeply of the cool morning air, Khor the Wanderer took the highway that led to the east.

TRAPPING THE TINY!

NO science fiction author has ever imagined the true marvels of the Ultra Short Wave. Both Radio and Television today possess marvels undreamed by imaginative writers. Keep posted with facts as well as fiction. Do you know the methods science employs to build antenna capable of picking up these ultra short vibrations? Could you BUILD such an antenna? Discover how now.



READ THE
BIG APRIL ISSUE

**RADIO
NEWS**

ON SALE AT ALL
NEWSSTANDS

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Continued from Page 4)

SCIENCE scores again! According to the Geological Survey, water will not boil at a height of twenty miles. Therefore, they state, it would be impossible to boil an egg at that height. They tell us that it is not impossible to boil an egg atop Pike's Peak, where water boils at 180 degrees, rather than the 212 degrees normal at sea level. So it would seem that stratosphere travelers of the year 2000 will have to do without their boiled egg in the morning. It will be a hardship.

DR. LEONHARD STEJNEGER of the Smithsonian Institute comes forth to blast the ancient and honorable theory that toads remain alive while imbedded in solid rock. He says: "The fact is, toads for the purpose of hibernation dig holes in the ground or crawl into fissures of rocks. Occasionally such specimens are found after blasting operations and the conclusion hastily drawn that the toad had been living inside the solid rock."

Well, there goes another of our superstitions. Science surely has been blasting away at superstition at that, hasn't it? We've been placing supernatural explanations on natural things for long ages, since we swung by our tails in primeval trees, and superstition has become such an inborn habit that even the most scientific minded of us still retain some bits of it. However, most of us are beginning to swing the other way now, and instead of avoiding walking under ladders, or detouring black cats, we deliberately walk beneath, or give the cat a glassy stare of contempt.

THE 100 inch telescope at Mt.

Wilson brings the apparent surface of the moon to within 31 miles of Earth, and we are told that the new 200-inch telescope at Palomar will reduce this apparent distance to less than eight miles. Maybe someday some enterprising advertiser will think to use this marvelous advertising space. They think of everything else!

AND just to further confuse us, physicists tell us sound sometimes is so loud it can't be heard. They tell us the human ear is paralyzed by the advance wave of a very loud sound and refuses to register it.

Another interesting point about sound they bring to our attention is the fact that two sounds, contrary to what we'd believe, are sometimes not as loud as one, in fact they cancel each other out, and we hear nothing at all! They explain it this way: Two sounds, meeting each other so that the condensation part of one wave meets the rarefaction part of the other, will neutralize each other. Strike a

tuning fork and twirl it slowly about its axis. The sound will become faint four times in a revolution where the two sound waves from the two prongs interfere with each other.

STORMS caused by sunspots were traced to their real lair by observing the time at which they occurred. It seems that magnetic storms on the earth generally, although not always, occur when there is a large spot near the central meridian of the sun. These storms frequently recur at intervals of 27.3 days, which is the period of the sun's synodic revolution. The average time of the commencement of a magnetic storm is about 30 hours after the passage of the spot over the central meridian of the sun.

HERE, in case you haven't been able to discover the data, is a little about Pluto, our outermost planetary neighbor. Her distance from earth is now 41 astronomical units, or 3,813,000,000 miles. Her mass is known to be smaller than at first believed, and it is tentatively placed at about that of Earth. Her orbit is elliptical, its plane inclined to that of the other major planets at about 31 degrees,

21 minutes. The size of her orbit is roughly 433 astronomical units, or 433 times 93 million miles. (This is the long diameter.) The time she will require for a complete circuit of her orbit is 3200 years. She will be visible to earth telescopes for perhaps a hundred years more, then will vanish into space for 3000 years. However, we'll no doubt have developed more powerful telescopes by then, so don't worry about losing track of one of the favorite worlds of our science fiction writers.

WE were recently visited by science fiction author Robert Moore Williams, who is well known by science fiction readers, and as a result, he will turn his creative ability toward FANTASTIC ADVENTURES in the near future. Mr. Williams has some decided ideas on fantastic fiction and is

anxious to work them out on paper.

WHICH just about makes the last entry in your editor's notebook for this issue. We'll be back again in the next with a lot more of this type of jottings, and meanwhile we want your opinion on the magazine in general.

Our next issue will bring Paul to you once more, this time with the "Man From Venus" the second of his new series which will eventually carry the reader through the whole solar system. If we know anything about science fiction readers, this series will be hailed with delight. We've long needed a planetary analysis of science fiction's "creatures of other worlds."

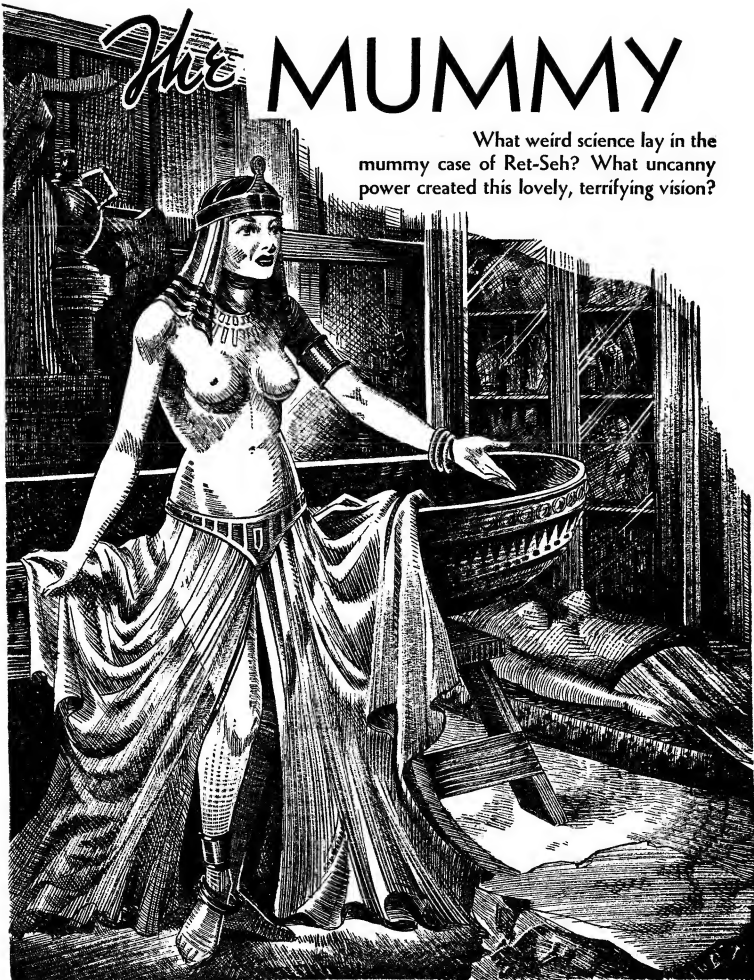
So write in and let us know what you think about your new magazine, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. We are open to all suggestions, because we intend to make the magazine the finest ever presented, and your opinion is valued.



"Honest to Pete, Folks, the Martians are here!"

The MUMMY

What weird science lay in the mummy case of Ret-Seh? What uncanny power created this lovely, terrifying vision?



OF RET-SEH

BY A. HYATT VERRILL

CHAPTER I

The Cat

THE mummy case was the finest thing of its sort that Hargraves ever had seen; a magnificent thing marvelous with paint and gold. It was a slender elaborate affair showing the figure of a woman, a woman who must have been a ravishing beauty in life if the carved and painted face was even a passable likeness of the original whose body was—supposedly—within the case.

Moreover, it was a strikingly lifelike face; a face

of perfect oval, with a delicate cleft chin, with beautifully rounded cheeks, with broad low forehead crowned with masses of black hair, with a thin straight nose that would have been imperious had it not been for the uptilted tip; with arching brows over lustrous eyes that seemed—even in painted form—to gaze up at Hargraves with a questing, ardent expression; and with carnine lips parted in an alluring, most provocative smile.

"Actually looks as if she wanted to be kissed," mused Hargraves as he stood off and admired the carved and painted figure. "Must have been a pretty thing if she looked like that. Regular heart-breaker, back in days of the Pharaohs, I expect. And what a figure! Might represent Pharaoh's daughter at the time she found little Moses."

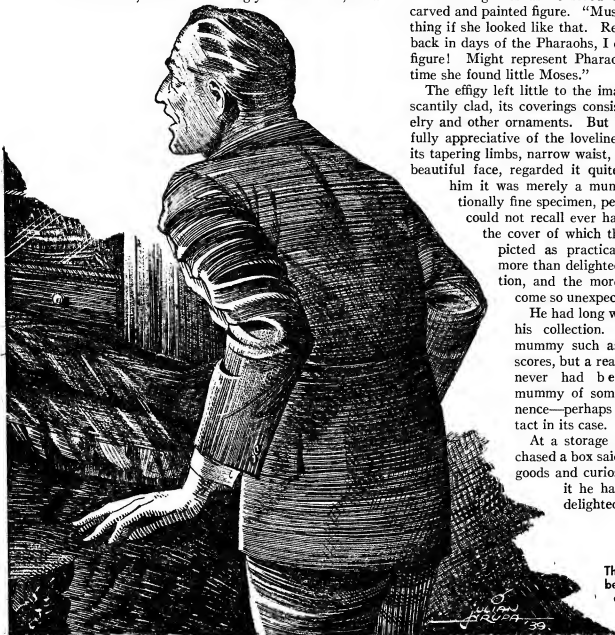
The effigy left little to the imagination, for it was scantily clad, its coverings consisting mainly of jewelry and other ornaments. But Hargraves, although fully appreciative of the loveliness of the form with its tapering limbs, narrow waist, rounded breasts and beautiful face, regarded it quite impersonally. To

him it was merely a mummy-case, an exceptionally fine specimen, perhaps unique, for he could not recall ever having seen a case on the cover of which the occupant was depicted as practically nude. He was more than delighted at his new acquisition, and the more so because it had come so unexpectedly.

He had long wanted a mummy for his collection. Not an ordinary mummy such as are obtainable by scores, but a really fine mummy that never had been unwrapped, a mummy of some personage of eminence—perhaps a royal mummy—intact in its case.

At a storage auction he had purchased a box said to contain Oriental goods and curios, and upon opening it he had been amazed and delighted at finding that the

There she stood, the most beautiful woman Hargraves had ever seen



"Oriental goods and curios" consisted of just such a mummy-case as he had longed to add to his private museum. Best of all, the case apparently had never been opened and still contained a mummy in its original wrappings.

Whose mummy, he wondered, was within it? Of course it would be that of a woman. But who was she? Was she the daughter of a Pharaoh? Was she of the nobility? Was she a priestess or a vestal virgin of some cult or temple? Was she the favorite wife of some long dead king, a royal concubine or merely some common courtesan?

It was fascinating to speculate on her identity, and Hargraves looked forward with keen anticipation to removing the wrappings from the deceased lady's body.

Dusting off the case he started to open it when he remembered that he had a dinner engagement with the Claytons. He had less than an hour in which to dress and rush off. He would have to leave the mummy case until another time. But he was consumed with curiosity to know beyond doubt if the case contained the mummy intact. He worked rapidly, almost feverishly, and at last the lid was loose.

Filled with suppressed excitement he gently raised the cover. Disturbed by the suction and the inrush of air, a little smokelike cloud of dust issued from the case, and Hargraves was aware of a most peculiar odor. It was not the musty smell of desiccated flesh and textiles, not the bituminous or spicy scent of frankincense or myrrh which might have been expected. Instead, it was pungently sweet, rather cloying, a sensuous perfume that reminded him of the odor of some exotic flowers.

But he scarcely noticed it at the time, as he peered into the case. Yes, the mummy was there. Wrapped in cloths that scarcely were stained, that were almost as white as on the day when they had been wound about the body, was a shapeless form—no doubt the mummy of the woman whose beauty was perpetuated upon the lid of the case.

Lowering the cover, Hargraves glanced at his watch and dashed off.

OF course, he had to tell the Claytons about the new acquisition to his collection.

Mrs. Clayton shuddered. "Really, I think it quite terrible—having such a gruesome object in one's home," she declared. "And positively indecent."

Her husband chuckled. "Because it's a young lady, my dear?" he inquired.

"No, because it is a dead body, even if mummified," she told him. "Would you care to have the body of your daughter treated as a curiosity and placed on exhibition?"

Clayton winked at Hargraves. "I haven't a daughter, you know," he reminded his wife, "and not being a Pharaoh I can't say how I should feel in regard to the matter."

But as Clayton was not interested in mummies, he

turned the conversation into other channels.

As his hosts did not keep late hours, and as he had an accumulated mass of correspondence to attend to, Hargraves left early, and he heard a clock strike eleven as he drove homeward.

As he stood before his door, fumbling for his key, a low "meow" caused him to turn. Seated upon the doorsteps, her tawny eyes fixed upon him, was a large tortoise shell cat.

"Well, puss, what do you want?" he asked good naturedly.

For answer the cat rose, arched her back and rubbed herself, purring, against his legs. She was an exceptionally fine and handsome specimen and Hargraves, who was fond of animals, stooped and stroked her head as he turned the key in the lock.

"Now run along home," he admonished her. But instead of obeying, the cat slipped through the door and vanished in the dark hallway.

"Here, kitty, kitty!" he called. "Come along. Out you go, tabby. This isn't your home."

But there was no response and he snapped on the lights. The cat, however, was nowhere to be seen. "Hmm," he thought as he removed hat and coat, "I'll have to hunt her up and put her out. Must belong to some neighbor, she's no common alley cat." Still, he reflected, there wasn't any hurry. He'd let her remain until he was ready for bed. She was an efficient looking beast and he had noticed signs of mice in the house. Make her pay for admittance, as one might say.

He stepped into his study and switched on the light. "Well, well!" You certainly have made yourself at home," he exclaimed, as he saw the cat curled upon the lounge by the open fire, her tawny eyes half-closed and watching him speculatively.

"All right, old girl," he said, as he seated himself at his table, "stay there if you're comfortable. And—" he added as he glanced at her—"you *are* rather decorative, you know."

Busy with papers and letters, Hargraves forgot the cat completely. Presently, however, he was aware of a peculiar odor obtruding itself upon his senses. It was most unusual and yet somehow familiar—a pungently sweet smell—and he sniffed suspiciously at a square, lavender-colored envelope he had not yet opened. Then, suddenly, he remembered. Of course! It was the same odor he had noticed when he had opened the mummy case. He must have left the door to his museum room ajar. A slight sound, suspiciously like a yawn, caused him to turn, sharply.

Dumbfounded, speechless, he stared incredulously, unable to believe the evidence of his senses.

Reclining upon the lounge, regarding him with half-closed languorous eyes, was a woman! In exactly the same pose, the same spot, as lay the cat just a few minutes earlier!

DESPITE his amazement and his chaotic state of mind at finding a strange female in his study,

Hargraves was aware of the fact that she was very lovely. And, mingled with his astonishment and his wonder as to who she was and how she had entered the room, was a distinct sense of embarrassment for the young lady was most scantily clad.

All these varied sensations, thought and reactions were instantaneous. And in the fraction of a second while they were flashing through his mind, he also sensed something familiar about the appearance of his alluring but uninvited and mysterious guest. Then, as once more that peculiar, exotic perfume filled his nostrils, a chill ran along his spine, his scalp tingled. The woman on the lounge was the living counterpart of the figure on the mummy-case!

For the briefest of moments, Hargraves was terrified. But the next second common senses drove fear from his brain. Of course it was only some optical or mental illusion. He hadn't been drinking, so it wasn't the result of alcohol. No, it was just his mental state—subconscious thoughts of the mummy plus a tired brain, coupled with that odor from the museum room. Of course there was no woman there. There simply couldn't be. Just imagination.

With no little effort of will power he closed his eyes. He held them closed one second, two seconds, five seconds. Then he raised his lids slowly, looking straight toward the lounge.

The woman was gone, completely disappeared. In her place lay the cat, with tawny eyes sleepily half-closed.

It was just as he had expected—purely a hallucination, a psychological matter. Still he didn't relish the idea of seeing visions. He never had been subject to nerves, optical illusions nor even dreams. He decided he had better see his physician. He must have been overdoing—needed a change of scene perhaps.

He yawned, stretched himself and turned to pick up the cat and put her out. But the creature had vanished.

He peered sleepily about the room, calling "Kitty, kitty," but there was no answering "meow."

"Bother the beast!" he muttered. "I'll put her out in the morning."

He turned to leave the room, cast a final glance at the lounge and started. Something that sparkled was resting among the cushions. He stepped forward and picked it up. Once again he felt that tingling at the back of his neck. The object was a little golden ornament—a pendant in the form of a cat's head!

For a moment Hargrave's head reeled. The thing was—"Rot!" he ejaculated. "I'm getting nerves. The thing must have dropped from the cat's collar."

Tossing the bauble onto his table, he switched off the lights, strode from the study and mounted the stairs to his bedroom. He was sleepier than he had realized. Undressing in a jiffy, Hargrave opened his window wide, switched off the bedroom light, and jumped into bed.

The next instant, with a choking, gurgling cry, he leaped to the floor. There, lying in the bed, reclining

comfortably under the covers, was a woman!

One arm was extended above her head, masses of dark hair covered the pillow, and to Hargrave's shattered senses her eyes appeared to shine with a tawny luminous light. He felt icy cold. He feared he had gone raving mad. And in his nostrils was that cloying perfume, almost overpowering in its intensity.

For fully ten seconds he stood there, flattened against the wall, gasping, on the verge of collapse. Then, summoning all his will power, and compelling his benumbed muscles to obey, he edged slowly towards the light switch, though keeping his eyes fixed upon that motionless form upon the bed. He was almost at the switch, his outstretched fingers were groping for it, when he stubbed his toe against a chair. Involuntarily, with a sharp cry of pain, he glanced down. At the same instant his fingers touched the switch and the room was flooded with light.

The bed was empty.

For a moment Hargraves stared. He could not believe it possible. The vision—for of course it had been a vision—had been so lifelike, so damnably real. And that odor! Was it possible, he wondered, for a person to have optical and nasal illusions coincidentally?

Trembling, shaken, nervous and overwrought, he moved toward the bed. It *was* empty, there wasn't the least doubt about that. It had been only— He leaped back as if struck. Upon the pillow was a hollow, an indentation such as a human head would have made.

With hands that shook so he scarcely could hold the glass, he poured himself a stiff drink of whiskey and gulped it down raw. Then, with set jaws, with grim determination, he secured his revolver, saw to it that it was fully loaded, and with electric torch in one hand and cocked pistol in the other, he started on a hunt for the cat.

He was convinced that the cat had been the direct cause of his hallucinations, for he mentally had convinced himself that they *were* hallucinations. There had been no woman on the lounge, no woman on the bed. The idea was utterly preposterous. A flesh and blood woman simply couldn't have been there, and he didn't believe in spirits or ghosts. As for those indentations on the pillow—they, of course, had been made by the cat.

Neither had he any intention of shooting at the visionary woman if she should again appear. If—he argued to himself as he switched on lights and searched through the rooms for the cat—if she were a vision, it would be ridiculous to shoot at it. And if not—but of course that was an utter impossibility—then he certainly was not going to murder some bold hussy who had intruded her unwelcome presence upon him.

In fact his mental state was decidedly chaotic. Although common sense told him that the whole affair had been a figment of his mind, the result of nerves and thoughts of the mummy, yet another lobe of his brain was arguing that it had been no figment of imagination; but that a woman actually had been in his

study and in his bed. Still another brain cell, which he could not stifle, was suggesting something occult and supernatural, and was connecting the visions with the mummy in a most unpleasant manner.

And despite his mental arguments and his utter disbelief in anything either inexplicable or supernatural, nothing on earth would have induced Hargraves to have entered the museum room.

But search as he might elsewhere, he could find no trace of the cat, and at last, cursing himself for a fool, and deciding he must consult Doctor Gale in the morning, he returned to his room, gulped down another double Scotch and, locking his door, went to bed.

CHAPTER II

The Lost Mummy

IT was very late when Hargraves awoke. The events of the night seemed like a dream; but the glass with the dregs of whiskey, the loaded revolver and the electric torch by his bedside assured him that they had actually taken place. And although he felt perfectly normal he did not alter his decision to see his physician.

Hargraves lived alone. He took all his meals out, and as he detested having servants about the place he had arranged for an eminently respectable middle-aged widow to come each morning to attend to the necessary housework. But the widow Stebbins had been given strict orders never to enter the museum room, for Hargraves would trust no one to dust and sweep about his cherished specimens.

"Did you see anything of a cat?" he asked Mrs. Stebbins, as he entered the study where she was busily dusting.

"A cat!" she exclaimed, looking at him in surprise. "Indeed, sir, I did not! And what might a cat be doing in your house, sir?"

"She was outside—on the doorstep—when I came in last night," he explained. "She slipped in when I opened the door. Couldn't find her when I went to put her out."

"Well, sir, she's not here now," the widow assured him. "And—" she added—"if she be, out she'll go the moment I put my eyes onto her. A cat indeed—" she muttered. "A tabby-cat in a bachelor's house. Now if 'twas a fine dog—" Her voice trailed off as Hargraves left the room.

Somewhat hesitatingly he opened the door to the room that housed his collections, and glanced within. Queer, he thought, how those ridiculous hallucinations of the night still affected him. He actually felt a trifle—well, not precisely afraid, but rather suspicious of the mummy case. Rot of course, but still— He stood staring, gaping.

The mummy case stood just where he had left it but—open! The lid was pushed far to one side, yet he could have sworn that he had closed it on the preceding afternoon. But—he decided

as he got his nerves under control—it must have been that in his hurry and excitement he had failed to replace the lid. This mental argument was not, however, as convincing as he would have liked. He remembered distinctly having lifted the lid but slightly—just enough to enable him to glance within the case in order to see if it contained the—

Resolutely he marched forward, and actually felt vastly relieved when he found the contents of the case intact. Laughing at his vague, almost superstitious uneasiness of a moment before, he replaced the lid, left the room and started for Doctor Gale's office.

HE wondered just how he could broach the subject to the physician. He hated to tell him what he had seen—or rather imagined. Yet he couldn't see a way out of it. Perhaps he could evade it by merely stating he had seen "things," without explaining just what. Or he might say he had seen a cat where it didn't exist. But no, that wasn't the same thing at all, for the cat *did* exist. Besides, he was convinced that the illusions were the result of his subconscious thoughts of the mummy. If the doctor was to be of any help he would have to know all the details.

Doctor Gale listened attentively as Hargraves, flushing a bit, gave his account of the events of the night. Then the physician burst into a roar of laughter and slapped his caller on the back.

"Gad!" he cried, "you are a lucky dog. Why, damme, I'd be pleased as Punch to have that sort of visions. And you wish to be rid of them—you beggar! Tut, tut, Hargraves!"

Hargraves flushed angrily. "I tell you there wasn't any girl," he insisted. "I just thought—"

"That you touched her, eh?" the other interrupted. "Why didn't you prove her unreality by going a bit further? Why didn't you try to kiss her? I should have done so."

Hargraves rose. "I came to consult you as my physician," he said in frigid tones. "I consider your levity and your remarks very unseemly. I shall—"

"No, you won't!" declared the doctor, pushing the other back into his chair. "Either you're a damn fool or else your nerves are in rotten shape, and I intend to learn which it is. Now, let me see. You purchase a mummy-case which presumably contains the mummy of an Egyptian beauty whose likeness is depicted upon the lid. Upon opening the case you notice a distinctive odor. My dear sir, all joking aside, the rest follows as a natural sequence.

"The cat—the symbol of femininity—merely served as the impetus to set in motion your psychological impressions. In other words you—well, I should deem them pleasurable—visions, were nothing more than waking dreams. Just as a slight noise acting upon a sleeping mind may cause vivid dreams of explosions, so the presence of a lithe and handsome cat, acting on your subconscious mind, created the vision of a woman in your mind.

"It's very simple, very simple indeed, and nothing

to worry about. Still it may occur again and again unless you have a care. I'll give you a nerve tonic, but I advise you to take a trip—to Bermuda, Madeira—anywhere so you'll have plenty of out of door exercise and fresh air and change of scene. And don't fool about with mummies or other junk, or play with stray cats."

Hargraves felt vastly relieved. The doctor's diagnosis had fully confirmed his own conclusions.

"I believe I will run off for a while," he said as he prepared to leave. "I had planned to unwrap the mummy; but perhaps I'd better wait until I return."

"By all means," the other told him.

Although Hargraves had every intention of obeying his physician's orders to the letter, yet as he left the doctor's office, his mind was more on mummies than on travels, and almost unconsciously he found himself parking his car before the archaeological museum.

PROFESSOR BLACKETT, who was busy poring over some Assyrian tablets, greeted Hargraves cordially, and he smiled indulgently as his visitor began to tell him about the latest addition to his collection. He knew these amateurs and how enthusiastic they became over trifles. But when the other described the mummy case, the scientist straightened up, instantly all attention.

"Let me have that again," he said when Hargraves had told about the figure on the lid. "You say the woman is scantily clad. What are the predominating colors, or didn't you notice? Are there any symbols—hieroglyphs?"

"Aside from the coloring of the skin, I should say there is little but red and green with a good deal of gold," Hargraves told him. "Yet, now I recall it, there is some black. Yes, there are characters, but of course they meant nothing to me."

Professor Blackett rose. "Would you recognize them if you saw them?" he asked as he searched among a stack of pamphlets.

"I'm positive I would—that is, some of them," the other declared.

The archaeologist selected a paper-covered volume, and opening it ran quickly through the pages until he came to a plate covered with engravings of Egyptian symbols. "See any of them there?" he asked.

Hargraves studied the figures intently. "Yes, there's one!" he exclaimed. "Here's another, and there are three more. I—"

"How about this?" the Egyptologist asked, turning to the frontispiece of the volume.

Hargraves almost jumped from his chair. "But—but—Good Lord! Why that's a picture of my mummy case!" he cried.

Professor Blackett smiled as he closed the book. "My dear sir let me be the first to congratulate you," he exclaimed. "Unless I am greatly in error, or unless your mummy case is a rank imitation, you are the possessor of the lost mummy of Ret-Seh."

"What!" gasped the other. "You mean you know who—what—What the deuce do you mean by a 'lost' mummy?"

The professor leaned back in his chair and placed the tips of his fingers together. "All Egyptologists know of the mummy of Ret-Seh," he replied. "It is one of the famous mummies of the archaeological world. It vanished most mysteriously from the collection of Professor Buenaventura of Milan. Stolen, undoubtedly, for the owner was found murdered—strangled—in his museum."

"Why on earth should anyone wish to steal a mummy and commit murder to do so?" Hargraves wanted to know.

"Collectors have been known to commit murder—or cause murder to be done—for much less than the mummy of Ret-Seh—for such trifles as books or pictures," the professor reminded him. "And this mummy was—or rather is—unique. As far as known it is the only mummy of a Pharaoh's favorite concubine whose identity positively has been established, and who is portrayed in the seductive attire in which she was wont to appear before her royal lover. Moreover, strange as it may seem, the body never had been unwrapped. Remarkable that! Buenaventura—who was the author of the monograph I showed you—had invited a number of Egyptologists to be present at the unwrapping of the mummy. But he was killed and the mummy case with its contents was stolen on the night preceding the appointed date.

"From that day to this, no one ever has seen or heard of the specimen. And as you state that the contents appear intact, it is obvious that no one ever has unwrapped the mummy. So you see, my dear sir, that you not only possess a very rare and famous mummy, but also one of which little—I might say almost nothing—is known. Unwrapping your mummy may reveal most unexpected results. Of course you will unwrap it? And if you will permit me to be present, to assist you, I shall be most deeply grateful."

Hargraves was deeply impressed by the other's words, and while Professor Blackett had been speaking he had been tempted to relate the story of the strange hallucinations of the preceding night. But Blackett was a hard-headed, practical, matter-of-fact scientist; and somehow Hargraves didn't relish the idea of broadcasting the fact that he was "seeing things." So he said nothing.

But the idea of unwrapping the mummy of the royal concubine was, somehow, rather repellent.

"Really, I hadn't thought much about that," he said, referring to the other's query. "But if you wish to do it—I presume it is important from a scientific standpoint—why, you're welcome to the job. It doesn't appeal to me. And if you do unwrap it, you'll do so here in the museum, if you don't mind. You see—Well, to tell the truth, a dead body is a dead body, after all. And, er, really, the case is all that interests me. You're welcome to the contents—gift to the museum, you know. But—" as a new idea oc-



Concealing himself, he waited until she appeared as a cat, then set upon her and killed her.

curled to him—"if the thing was stolen I have no right to it. Shouldn't it be returned to its rightful owners?"

The scientist smiled. "Who *are* the owners?" he asked. "Regardless of how Buenaventura obtained it, it was unquestionably stolen—rifled—from its tomb. As far as I am aware he had no heirs. No, I don't think the ethics of ownership need trouble you. And I shall be all impatience to remove the wrappings. I'd go with you now and get the specimen were it not that I have an appointment to meet Doctor Rumford who wishes my opinion on some truly wonderful jades he secured from a Persian tomb. But I'll be over to your place in the morning. And accept my heartiest thanks—on behalf of the museum—for the gift."

Hargraves felt rather relieved at thought of being rid of the mummy. Funny, he'd been so keen on having a mummy, and now he had one—and a most valuable one at that—he didn't want it and was more than willing to give it away. In fact he was tempted to increase his donation to the museum by including the case together with its contents. After all, he mused, it was the case and not the mummy that had caused his hallucinations. And if the case remained in his home weren't such illusions liable to recur? Of course he would rid himself of that confounded cat—provided Mrs. Stebbins hadn't found her and put her out. But even so—Well, perhaps he'd better let the

matter rest as it was until he returned from his trip.

REMEMBERING Doctor Gale's admonition to forget mummies and cats, Hargraves resolutely put aside thoughts of all such matters and spent the day playing golf. Then he dined at his club, passed the evening at a revue and drove home tired, sleepy and with all thoughts of the mummy completely driven from his mind. He had intended to go directly to bed. But there were some documents which his lawyers required, and fearing he might forget them if he waited until the next day, he decided to sign them and have them ready to post in the morning.

With this matter in mind he entered his study, and halted in his tracks, staring into the darkness. Glowing like living coals in the blackness were two points of yellow fire. Two gleaming luminous eyes!

For an instant a strange undefinable dread held him in its grip. Then he laughed. "That damned cat again!" he exclaimed as he snapped on the switch.

As sudden light flooded the room, the cat leaped from the lounge, and with a startled "meow," dashed across the floor through the heavy curtain that covered the door leading to the museum room.

"No, you don't!" cried Hargraves, springing after the creature. "This time you go out and stay out. I've—"

The words froze on his lips. He staggered back,

gasping, stunned, cold with terror. For, beside the now open mummy case stood the erect form of a woman, one bare arm resting on its edge!

TO Hargraves' fear-stricken eyes she seemed the figure on the mummy case come to life. There was no mistaking her. The face, with those seductive tawny eyes were the same. The perfect, alluring form, revealed in all its lithe symmetry and beauty by the transparent garments, even the semi-barbaric jewelry, were identical. She was the same mysterious, uncanny, ghostly being whom he had seen upon the lounge, whom he had seen and touched—a shudder went over him at the memory—upon his bed. And—so inexplicable are the workings of the human brain—even in his stark, brain-paralyzing terror, he noticed that among the pendants attached to her golden collar—pendants in the form of cats' heads—there was one missing!

Also, he was aware of that same overpowering, sweetish, pungent perfume, which, each time, had accompanied the apparition.

But now he knew she was not an apparition, not an illusion nor a trick of his eyes or brain. He felt she was as real, as solid, as much flesh and blood as himself, and therefore the more terrible, the more supernatural.

Hargraves, standing rooted there, white, shivering with nameless dread, could not have said *why* he was so abjectly terrified. The vision was very lovely. She was almost too beautiful, too perfect to be human. Her lips were parted in an alluring, provocative smile, her amber-colored eyes under the long lashes fairly beckoned. But her very beauty and seductiveness held an intangible warning of deadly peril and created the instinctive horror that one feels when gazing at a handsome, sinuous but venomous serpent. Emanating from her, surrounding her like an invisible aura, was an atmosphere of unholy and supernatural devilishness that was more terrible and sinister than anything tangible could have been.

For several seconds she stood motionless, her half-closed eyes gazing at Hargraves who, powerless to move, transfixed, incapable of uttering a sound, stared back at her as if under a hypnotic spell. Then, slowly raising her arms and extending her hands, she glided noiselessly toward him!

The unutterable horror that he had before felt was nothing to the paralyzing fear that gripped him now. He felt riveted to the floor, frozen to the spot, while slowly, with outstretched arms, with parted lips and ardent eyes the hellish being, the diabolically beautiful woman who was not of earth but had arisen from the grave, approached him. He was held as if by some fiendish spell, incapable of escaping, incapable of crying out.

The cloying odor of her perfume was overpowering him, drugging him. His head reeled, he felt as if he must be going mad. A moment more and she would be within reach. Her hands were almost touching

him. He could see the rise and fall of her full voluptuous breasts. He could feel her hot breath. Her eyes were looking into his, searing his brain. Then her arms encircled his neck and he felt the pressure of her vivid passionate body against his own. Her parted lips were upturned, seeking—

At the touch of her flesh, stark horror swept over him. Her skin was cold, clammy—the skin of a corpse!

The contact galvanized him into life. He screamed, he struggled and tore madly at those awful arms clasped about his neck.

And then—Oh God!—His hands closed upon dry bones! Skeleton fingers were gripping him, digging into his flesh. Grinning into his face was a hideous, ghastly, eyeless skull!

Mouthing, shrieking like a maniac, he struck out viciously, madly. His fists crashed hollowly against skeletal ribs. The hideous arms fell from his neck. Reeling away from him, he saw a shrunken, desiccated mummified body!

A strange unearthly banshee-like wail rang in his ears. The world went black before his eyes. He staggered, swayed and fell unconscious to the floor.

CHAPTER III

Professor Blackett's Discovery

HARGRAVES came to his senses with a violent start. He felt weak and shaken, and as memory returned his teeth chattered and he shivered with icy chills. Dreading what he might see he opened his eyes and stifled the scream that rose to his lips. The woman bending over him was not that ghastly apparition, but Mrs. Stebbins.

"Thanks be to God!" she exclaimed as she saw he had regained consciousness. "Take this, sir," she lifted his head and placed a glass of brandy to his lips. "I was just about to call for the police or the ambulance," she informed him. "Lord save us, whatever did happen, Mr. Hargraves? I came in to tidy up and found you in a dead swoon on the floor, and a beastly great cat settin' here beside you. How *she* got in I don't know—what with all the doors locked and the windows screened. And if you'll pardon me for saying so, sir, I'd say, if I didn't know you was a respectable bachelor, and a gentleman if ever there was one, that there'd been a woman in this house. Maybe the cat slipped in along with her. And no good woman at that, sir, judging by the perfume I smelled—strong enough to have knocked me down, it was. But, thanks to God, you're out from your swoon and all right again now, sir. And no harm done, whatever the strange goings on may have been—Which is no business of mine of course. But—"

The ringing of the door bell interrupted her volubility.

"If that is Professor Blackett have him come in,"

Hargraves told her as he sat up and glanced furtively about. "And kindly leave us to ourselves, Mrs. Stebbins," he called after her as she hurried off. "I'm all right now. Attack of indigestion, I expect. Sorry I frightened you."

"Why, why! Whatever is the matter?" cried the Egyptologist as he entered the study. "Upon my word, Hargraves, you look really ill. You're as white as if you had seen a ghost."

A shudder swept over Hargraves. With an effort he controlled himself and looked steadily at the scientist. "I have," he said.

"What? What's that?" the other exclaimed. "You—you've—"

"Seen a ghost," Hargraves declared. "I'm serious. Professor I'm going to tell you something that will appear preposterous to you, a scientist. You may think I'm insane—I shall not blame you if you do. But I assure you I'm as sane as anyone, as yourself for example. Neither am I what you might call a drinking man. Doctor Gale says it's nerves—illusions. I *know* it is not."

"But my dear man, whatever are you driving at?" cried the other.

"That's what I'm about to tell you," replied Hargraves.

Professor Blackett listened silently to the story of his friend's weird, horrible, inexplicable experiences.

"Now what is your honest opinion?" Hargraves asked him when he had told everything.

"It's absolutely astounding!" replied the Egyptologist. "But I agree with your physician. You have been subject to strange—to most distressing and unpleasant hallucinations. Such illusions—"

"Do illusions leave scratches and marks like these?" demanded Hargraves showing Professor Blackett the back of his neck.

"No," admitted the scientist, "but a cat's claws might."

"How about this?" As he spoke Hargraves handed Blackett the golden cat's head he had found on the lounge. "That's no hallucination," he added.

The Egyptologist examined it carefully. "Hmm," he muttered. "It appears to be genuine. But it might have been on the cat's collar as you surmised. As a scientist I do not, will not admit the possibility of anything occult or supernatural. You asked for my candid opinion. It is precisely that of your doctor. You need a change of scene and should give your mind a complete rest."

"I intend to do so," Hargraves assured him. "I'm leaving for California tonight. About that damnable mummy. You're welcome to the whole show—case and all."

Professor Blackett fairly beamed with delight. "Really, I cannot find words to express my—the museum's gratitude," he exclaimed.

"Don't bother to try," said Hargraves. "Only get the damned thing out of here. I never want to see it or hear of it again. And if you find that beastly cat drown her, shoot her, chloroform her—anything to make sure she'll never come back."

ONCE more in his office at the museum, with the precious mummy case safe within the walls of the institution, Professor Blackett searched among his books until he found the one he sought. Running his eyes over the index he turned to a page bearing the heading: "RET-SEH."

"The favorite concubine of Ptonomah II," he read. "Famed for her great beauty and as a sorceress. It is related that by means of her magic she could transform herself into a cat. Thus disguised she would pass boldly through the royal chambers and from the palace and would meet her lovers whom she would seduce by appearing to them in her natural form."

"Hmm, an all-around bad egg, I should say," commented the scientist as he turned the page.

"It is further recorded," he read on, "that her infidelity having been discovered by the king, he determined to put her to death. But bewitched by her charms and beauty, he found it impossible to destroy her while in human form. So, concealing himself, he waited until she appeared as a cat, whereupon he fell upon her and killed her."

Professor Blackett closed the volume. "Astounding!" he muttered as he replaced the book on its shelf. "A remarkable coincidence, but of course merely a coincidence—nothing more. Strange though, very strange! I think it is just as well that I did not mention that silly old legend to Hargraves."

Neither did he ever tell Hargraves that when the mummy case was opened and the wrappings were removed, it was found to contain a most perfectly preserved mummy of—a huge tortoise shell cat!

ANNOUNCEMENT

Beginning with the April issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES' sister magazine AMAZING STORIES, we instituted a new prize award for the best story in each issue, to continue indefinitely. So popular has this new award become, and so keen the voting on the leading stories, we have decided to inaugurate the same feature in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. So, beginning with our next issue, we will pay to the

author of the leading story in each issue, as determined by reader reaction, a prize of \$75.00, and to the author of the second ranking story, a prize of \$25.00. In other words, \$100.00 additional, each month, to our authors, at the command of the reader! Here's your chance to reward your favorite author, and at the same time, urge him on to even finer work in the future.—THE EDITORS.

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The Devil



Gregory screamed in utter agony as the Devil Flower whipped him from his feet

Flower

By
HARL VINCENT

CHAPTER I

Dr. Gregory's Hospital

"W HAT a job I picked out!" Dr. Frank Robeson was talking to himself grumpily.

A crudely stenciled sign on the main highway had said "Gregory Pines Sanitarium . . . two miles." Frank had followed the tortuous windings of the steep and narrow side road for more than twice that distance.

Abruptly his roadster nosed out into a clearing.

"For crying out loud!" Frank whispered to himself, "where am I?"

Across this clearing he was in, there was the entrance to a rocky gorge that cut into the sharply rising slope ahead.

Frank shifted gear and clung to the wheel as his protesting car bumped into the shadows.

Something devilish was killing his patients and Frank Robeson came to Gregory Pines to track down the mystery

Here the going was even worse. The dry floor of the canyon was strewn with boulders and loose rock. The ravine twisted as had the road through the woods. Suddenly from around one of its contours came a roaring, clattering juggernaut. A hoarse shout, the screech of brakes. Frank wrenched his wheel, swerving the roadster to the wall of the canyon. Too late. A careening flivver struck his car with a sickening grind of fenders, caromed off and rolled over. At once it burst into flames.

In swift fear for the driver of the other car, Frank stumbled toward the blazing wreck. His assistance was not needed—or wanted. A cadaverous, thick-spectacled individual in soiled dungarees crawled from the heap and made off down the ravine without a backward glance.

"Hi, there!" Frank sang out. "Are you hurt?"



Leaping among the thrashing tentacles, Robeson plunged the hypodermic deep



A ghastly, tentacle-like something wrapped about his neck and strangled.

The stranger wheeled jerkily, his narrow chalky features contorted with an emotion which might have been either fear or rage. "Lemme be!" he snarled. "If I was you I'd be gettin' along outa here before this gas tank blows up."

He turned and shambled away until lost to view around a bend. Amazed and angered, Frank stared after him. But he heeded the advice of the churlish yokel and returned speedily to his own car.

Ruefully he surveyed its damaged side. But the motor purred softly when he depressed the starter pedal, and his roadster lurched forward with its usual vigor. The running gear, fortunately, was undamaged.

Soon there echoed through the canyon the rumbling detonation which told him that fire had reached the gasoline tank of the wrecked car.

"And that," grinned Frank Robeson, "is that."

Then his grin froze to a grimace of horror. On the hood of his own car was a blob of bloody, fleshy substance. But it was not meat, either animal or human. It was something infinitely more ghastly, tentacle-like, translucent—evidently blown away from the explosion. Shuddering, Frank jumped to the ground and wiped it from the metal with a greasy rag, then slid back under the wheel and drove crazily toward his destination.

His broad face again relaxed and a puzzled light was in his steel-blue eyes when he came out of the gorge and looked up at the rambling frame structure that nestled amid the pines on the mountainside before him. It was the institution he had come so far to visit. An indefinable gloom lay over it—like a pall.

Pulling off at the side of the road, he regarded the place thoughtfully. Nothing marked it as greatly different from the many health resorts in the mountains.

The broad porch, the green shutters, the spacious grounds with the inevitable croquet court, the arched signboard—all were conventional. And yet . . .

FRANK was probably the only staff member of New York's Park Medical Center who had entertained any doubts at all regarding Dr. Gregory's hospital. And only recently at that. He had voiced his suspicions to his old friend, Dr. Dudley Cowan, chief of the surgical staff.

"Nonsense," Cowan had said. "Frank, we've been sending private patients to Gregory for years. You've sent many of your own. You know as well as I do that all who return are enthusiastic."

"Some haven't come back," was Frank's rejoinder.

Cowan's wrinkled brow had furrowed more deeply at this. "True," he admitted grudgingly, "and both were your patients. I know how you must feel, but I still think you're barking up the wrong tree. We can't question Gregory's trustworthiness."

"All the same, I'm going to run up there to look the place over," Frank told him stubbornly. "Tomorrow."

Frank had set out on the tiresome motor trip with grim determination. Two of his patients had died at Gregory Pines within six months. Of pernicious anaemia, the death certificate read. Peculiar. But Gregory's reputation was spotless; it would be folly to question his diagnoses. And unethical.

At first Frank had been only puzzled. Later he had sent Lemuel Curtis to the institution to recuperate from a severe operative case of double mastoiditis. Vague misgivings assailed him when Curtis left, but he was utterly unprepared for the telephone message that came from Curtis a few days later. Curtis was a wealthy broker.

"The whisper of death is in the air here," Curtis told him over the wire. "I'm panicky, Doctor. I've lost hope."

"Keep a stiff upper lip. I'll be up to see you."

Frank Robeson was a man of his word. But now that he was here he was not at all sure of himself. If Lem Curtis died . . .

He shivered. An uncanny silence was upon the place of the wind in the pines. He remembered the fear-husky voice of Curtis over the telephone. And he even thought of that gory blob in the gorge.

Shaking off his feelings, he started his car. There was but one thing to do. He'd make himself known to Gregory and ask to see Curtis professionally. He'd stay a few days and watch things.

The breeze whipped his shock of sandy hair into a



tangle as the roadster labored up the steep drive. Grim lines were around his lips and his shoulders squared aggressively. Seeing him thus, observers might have thought him a determined sportsman rather than one of the cleverest surgeons of the metropolis. Which Frank was.

MARTIN GREGORY was a genial if somewhat pompous man in his early fifties. A Vandyke beard and owlish eyes gave him a professorial air. His was the assured manner of one long used to deference. He was a man satisfied with his own success. But his hand was flabby and moist in the hearty grip of his caller.

Frank came to the point at once. "Any objection to my visiting Lemuel Curtis, Doctor?" he asked.

"None at all." Gregory was hesitant and his pudgy fingers were tapping the desk top. "Curtis, I might warn you, is not improving as we had expected."

"No?" Frank raised his left eyebrow in the disconcerting way he had. "There has been no change in treatment, I presume?"

"None. You are at liberty to examine the patient's chart."

Still those thick fingers tapped the desk. Frank thought that he saw an uneasy flicker in the other's eyes.

"Gregory," he blurted, "you're holding something back."

The older man flushed, then paled. "I resent that, Doctor," he spluttered. "What do you mean?"

"I'll reply with another question. Does Curtis have symptoms resembling those of Galloway and Ingalls before their deaths?"

"A-ah!" Gregory rose angrily, then dropped into his chair. "You've asked for it and I'll tell you. Yes, the symptoms are the same—and you should know them well." He stared accusingly.

"I!" Amazed, Frank returned the stare blankly.

"Who else?" Gregory's voice dropped suggestively and his eyes were shifty. "It had struck me that your last three patients arrived in quite different condition from that reported by you. Why did you send them, Doctor Robeson?"

Frank had caught a Tartar. The older man had turned the tables adroitly and was regarding him from beneath lowered lids. What had been implied was plain enough.

"You surprise me," Frank replied slowly, checking his rising ire, "I've sent my patients to you in good faith and usually with excellent results. But Galloway and Ingalls died here. Curtis, you say, is in a condition similar to theirs. You infer that I know something about it, that I knowingly sent you hopeless cases. This I deny, and I want your explanation."

Gregory smiled oily. "Perhaps we're talking at cross purpose," he offered, again placatingly. "I admit these three cases puzzled me. Possibly I was wrong in mistrusting you."

"You were wrong,"—curtly. "Do I take it from

you that the Galloway and Ingalls death certificates were falsified?"

"That's damned impertinence!" bellowed Gregory, purpling. "I did not understand—do not—" He subsided glumly.

"In other words you don't know what is wrong with Curtis?"

"Do you?" His bovine placidity returning, Gregory leered.

"I only know his condition when he left New York,"—stiffly. "It was satisfactory outside of the usual post-operative weakness."

"Come, come, Doctor!" Gregory arose, genial once more. "You and I are beating about the bush. We must admit that conditions seem to be odd. We'll see Curtis immediately; then I'll leave it to you to say who is at fault."

Though unsatisfied, Frank assented. On the way he mused darkly.

More than ever he was suspicious. Certainly no untoward symptoms had marked any of these cases. Gregory's nervousness, his most evasive replies, his sudden changes of front, were decidedly mysterious.

And there was that red *thing* on the hood of the car.

CURTIS, it developed, was quartered in a private cabin some little way from the main building. The path through the pines led past a low rambling structure which Gregory explained was his experimental laboratory. He did not dwell on the subject further, seeming most reluctant to do so, and that served to arouse Frank's suspicions still more.

"Biological?" he asked, striving to speak pleasantly.

"Partly so," Gregory implied by his air that it was none of his visitor's business.

But Frank had seen a skulking figure at the rear of the building. It was the gaunt and colorless individual of the soiled dungarees.

"Who's that?" he demanded.

"Rufus Ballinger. Sort of helps me in the laboratory. Expert botanist." Gregory hurried along the path, obviously wishing to avoid the neighborhood of the laboratory.

Frank cudgeled his memory. Ballinger's name was familiar but most elusive. Somehow, somewhere, he had heard of this man. And in an unsavory connection, he felt sure. It would come to him later. He looked back, saw the thick-spectacled one bending over a most curious milky-stemmed plant that grew waveringly from a pot he was removing from an open hotbed.

"Here's where Curtis is," said Gregory, indicating a small green and white house with broad sleeping-porches and awninged windows.

It was a most attractive place, ideally located, and obviously of most modern design. Entering with his host, Frank saw that it was arranged to take care of two patients and had a well-appointed room for the nurse between the two bedrooms. Only one bed was

(Continued on page 91)

Introducing THE AUTHOR

ARTHUR R. TOFFE

Author of REVOLT OF THE ROBOTS



Arthur R. Toffe

SINCE the miracle of being born is probably the most important scientific as well as physical feat in the story of every man, I suppose I should begin at that point.

Of course, as a future writer of scientific yarns, I should have picked my birthplace somewhere east of a chemistry laboratory and north of a test tube. I should have chosen Thomas A. Edison as my father and Madame Curie as my mother, with Albert Einstein as midwife.

I should have come into being in a thermally

controlled incubator and my first words should have been haematocytotrypsis, philosophocracy, and choledocholithotomy. I should have developed rapidly and lectured at the Sorbonne at the age of 22 months.

Instead of all this, however, I was born in an old brown-stoned apartment building on Chicago's west side, somewhere between Douglas and Humboldt Parks. The day was Sunday, June 8, 1902. It was raining.

No one remembers what my first words were. And at 22 months I was still toddling around.

Growth followed at the usual pace, accompanied by the ordinary pains and pangs that every kid has. In 1925, I graduated from the University of Wisconsin, and immediately got an advertising job. I've been at it ever since, with a succession of interesting jobs that have taken me to New York, Newark, Cleveland, Chicago, Milwaukee, Denver, Los Angeles, and a lot of other cities in between.

Writing ad copy on bathroom scales, steam shovels, patent medicines, exercising machines, motor trucks, kitchen utensils, and just about everything else that people can be induced into buying has given me a lot of fun and a fair living in the past fourteen years (some bad periods during the late depression).

My most interesting job was as advertising manager of the Tom Thumb Miniature Golf company (remember 'way back when?). This job actually took me to Europe where I spent six months riding around on a bicycle.

At present I am copy chief in the advertising department

of Allis-Chalmers company, largest concern in Wisconsin. By day I write about motors, pumps, milling and mining machines, etc. By night and week-ends, I write scientific stories about machines and people of the future.

It was my good fortune to know one of the greatest science fiction writers of all times. As a member of the Milwaukee Fictioneers, I was a close friend of Stanley Weinbaum. In fact, it was his example and influence that started my interest in this field.

It was while I was reading an article in one of the digest magazines about queer and unusual wills and the part they have played in history that I happened to get the idea for **REVOLT OF THE ROBOTS**.

I got to wondering what kind of a will it would take to affect the future of mankind. Almost any will affects the future of the persons who are beneficiaries. But I wondered what kind of a will it would take to affect the whole of the human race. Needless to say with this for a start, and the next thousand years or so of history to play with, it was fun to spin the yarn, and incidentally to get off my chest some pet ideas on how I think the human race is progressing. Each writer—and each reader for that matter—has his own ideas of where mankind is headed. But a thousand years from now—at the speed we are going—who can really tell! Anyway it's fun to guess.—Arthur R. Toffe, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

EANDO BINDER

Author of **THE INVISIBLE ROBINHOOD**

THE man who discovered a method of true invisibility—granting that premise—could do all the things I mentioned in this story, and then some! Unseen, he could stalk about like an invisible crusader, righting the wrongs that most of us see, but none of us can do anything about. Provided, of course, that he has the necessary courage and intellect to see his way through.

I didn't think it important in the story to explain just how he carried out the inescapable duties of eating, sleeping, etc. without detection. But it's simple enough. With his invisibility suit off and stored in a suitcase, he rents quarters to live in. When he goes out for one of his exploits, he wears the suit, leaving his quarters as an invisible man. This might at times involve opening doors when people are looking, but before they would have the wits to investigate, he'd be gone. After his exploit, back to his rooms to take the suit off. Then out to eat, as one of millions of others.

At times, on the streets or elsewhere, he'd be unavoidably bumped by people. They'd be mystified, or perhaps frightened, but even if they had the nerve to try to grab him, or any reasonable reason for trying it, he'd have the

jump on them. By dint of agility and timing, he'd be able to ride subways, streetcars, etc., picking uncrowded hours. Of course, it's simpler than that, with Ted Marne as his confederate. Ted Marne drives him anywhere in his car.

Those details by the board, he could carry out his exploits as described. Given publicity, he could quickly become an A-1 boogey-man to criminal interests. Not to mention the shivers and chills he'd cause in sensitive minds of all walks of life. If, after reading the story, you flick your eyes about the room surreptitiously, thinking of the invisible man who might be at *your* elbow!!!—Eando Binder, New York, N. Y.

FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.

Author of

ADVENTURE IN LEMURIA

FRANKLY, I don't see why anyone should be interested in me personally. . . . I'm quite an uninteresting person. Perhaps my mundane existence accounts for my writing of colorful fantastic lands, brave adventures, and bizarre characters. None the less, your editors have requested the awful truth so here it is.

I am a somewhat rubicund person, aged 25 (26 by the time this sees print) and a native of Baltimore, Maryland. I live on a quiet, shady old street and work eight hours a day in a third floor studio. My relaxations include bridge, chess, table-tennis, and dogs . . . with trout fishing, surf casting, and trolling in season. Apart from being a disciple of Isaac Walton, I am not much of a sportsman.

Among other things I've studied art, clerked in offices, and painted scenery for local productions. Writing is now my sole means of support, unless one takes into account consistent good luck at the race track. I'm unmarried, live with my parents, and hope someday to be as famous an author as my well-known father.

I want to say that I consider it quite an honor to be included in the list of contributors for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES' first issue. I have written for about every type of market imaginable, but only recently have I turned to the more imaginative fields. But after all, it is only a step from science-fiction to the fantasy magazines.

As to ADVENTURE IN LEMURIA . . . well, I have always believed in such a continent and have read with interest Colonel Churchward's admirable books on the subject. Also, I was a great admirer of the late Robert Howard's "Conan" and "King Kull" stories and hoped someday to write similar yarns. In ADVENTURE IN LEMURIA, I have tried, however, to avoid actual magic and witchcraft, preferring natural explanations of strange occurrences, as, for instance, self-hypnotism, the escape of natural gases from fissures in rock, and so on. I have also done considerable research on the subject. Thus, Khor the Cretan's peculiar tactics in overcoming the wild bulls are authenticated by murals unearthed at Minos on Crete, while incidents such as weapons, customs, modes of dress, etc. are whenever possible, based upon archaeological findings.

I hope you'll like Khor as much as I do. He's a pet character of mine and I'd enjoy writing more stories about his travels in the land of Mu. If you, the readers, agree, just drop a line to our editors and the stories will be forthcoming. And let me take this opportunity to extend my wishes for a long life and all success to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.—Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., Baltimore, Md.

ROSS ROCKLYNNE

Author of

THE EMPRESS OF MARS

I WAS born Feb. 21, 1913. I was like other boys—I played cops and robbers. And Charles R. Tanner tells me that I still have that simple, cops and robbers personality—as evidenced by my Colbie-Deverel stories. But I don't believe a word of it.

Move upward twelve years from 1913, then, and you see me entering boys' boarding school, staying there five years, gleaming from this establishment nothing that would have made me any worse than I am now. Along about this period, I was reading Tom Swift, the Rover Boys, the Bible, etc., and, being too impressionable, I took the morals in these stories too seriously, and frowned down upon smoking, drinking, breaking rules, talking back to mother, neglecting one's duty to one's country, etc. Fortunately, I have learned better now, and try to place everything in its true aspect—I try not to be too deadly serious about anything. But I still have trouble confusing fiction with real life.

So that's all about me in the years gone by, save that I did some stuff for a high school monthly, batting out stories and even jokes, would you believe it. I've done some traveling around in this immediate neighborhood, Indianapolis, Clarksburg, Detroit, and down around Kentucky. But I'd like to travel. I'd like to go to the World Science Fiction Convention.

I'm interested in most of the sciences, but have only a more or less complete knowledge of physics, because all the laws seem to hang so closely together. I like fantasy, of which science-fiction is apparently a branch. I like Erle Stanley Gardner. I read all the fantasy magazines I can.

My ambitions run toward five hundred thousand dollars, with which I shall give many people I know a chance to do what they've always wanted to do, and no buts about it.

So here I am, still in the middle of my story, for I'm only twenty-five years old. The story goes on, and will continue on, and every once in awhile you'll run across another of my stories, and I hope (vainly) that you'll like them all. But here's a quotation that applies to me, to the human race, and also to George Bernard Shaw who originated it: "I'm doing the best I can at my age."—Ross Rocklynne, Cincinnati, Ohio.

A. HYATT VERRILL

Author of

THE MUMMY OF RET-SEH

FOR nearly fifty years A. Hyatt Verrill, author, illustrator, explorer and scientist, has led expeditions into the tropical regions of South and Central America and the West Indies in search of varied knowledge in a dozen fields of study.

He was scarcely seventeen when he made his first trip to the island of Dominica (B.W.I.), to secure collection of Natural History, and since then he has visited practically all of the remote regions of Latin America.

He has tramped the unknown jungles of Darien and the so-called "forbidden" district of the Kuna Indians. For five years he followed the jungle creeks and jungle trails of British Guiana, visiting every tribe within this area, studying their customs, dialects and habits and collecting speci-

mens of their artifacts, weapons and utensils. In Panama he discovered the remains of an unknown prehistoric culture and carried on extensive excavations, securing more than 20,000 specimens. In the jungles of Santo Domingo (Hispaniola) he searched for and secured specimens of a supposedly extinct "missing link" among the mammal, *Solenodon paradoxus*.

For more than six years he explored the deserts and Andes of Peru, Bolivia and Chile conducting archaeological investigations and making collections of ancient pre-Incan and Incan races.

He was made a blood-brother of the chief of the Carib Indians in Guiana, he was adopted into the Guaymí tribe of Panama and was made a "medicine-chief." He was also made a member of the Sioux tribe and given the name of Tchanka Tanka or "Big(long) Road" because of his extensive expeditions.

As a result of his scientific expeditions, many valuable specimens of Natural History, ethnology and archaeology have been added to various museums in the United States and Europe.

In addition to his scientific researches he devoted several years to making a complete series of oil paintings of South and Central American Indians from life, most of which are in the Museum of the American Indian in New York City. Mr. Verrill is the author of more than 100 books on a great variety of subjects and has contributed many articles and stories to magazines in England and the United States. For many years his stories were a regular feature of **AMAZING STORIES**.

Mr. Verrill is a recognized authority on the South American Indian, the prehistoric civilizations of Peru and Bolivia and on lost and buried treasures. He has conducted several treasure-seeking expeditions and in one of these located and partly salvaged a sunken Spanish galleon in the Caribbean Sea.

MAURICE DUCLOS

Author of

THE SLEEPING GODDESS

BORN at Little Falls, Minnesota, in March, 1914. Moved west at the ripe old age of three months. As you've probably heard, there are no more Indians out here to fight—so I've led a pretty prosaic life.

I first became aware of science fiction in 1927 when on a short vacation. We were camped at the beach. It was the day after Fourth of July, and things were still popping. I stumbled upon a coverless magazine half buried in the sand, and retired into the tent to do a little reading. It was a strange magazine called **AMAZING STORIES**. Space ships, strange creatures, and flights to Mars tumbled from every page; I became absorbed—so absorbed that when I finally looked up I found a hole about two feet in diameter burning merrily in the side of the tent, ignited, no doubt, by some vagrant firecracker.

My first literary efforts were made in the Los Angeles General Hospital where I was laid up with infantile paralysis. First story I sold was the fifth one that blundered from my pen.

My principal hobby is a workshop that boasts two metal-cutting lathes, diverse pieces of machinery, and a little

foundry for melting aluminum.

Where did I get the idea for *The Sleeping Goddess*? Simple—from a bottle of water! Yes, a gallon jug half filled with water gave me inspiration for this story. Moss covered the inside bottom of the bottle, and gave off a constant stream of tiny bubbles. By bringing the jug close to my eye and squinting, the moss seemed to stretch before me like a vast rolling plane of green vegetation on which great bubbles formed. I realized instantly that here was material for a yarn. I enlarged the glass bottle to a huge transparent wall miles in diameter; instead of water I filled it with blue gas; then I put in the bubbles and a few other abnormalities to add color. Mixed into this was a hero and a savage race for conflict—the outcome was *The Sleeping Goddess*.—Maurice Duclos, Bell, California.

HARL VINCENT

Author of

THE DEVIL FLOWER

A RATHER interesting experience lies behind my using injections of phenol to destroy the living plant in *The Devil Flower*. In 1919, I had occasion to conduct some powerhouse tests at a large chemical plant in the State of Massachusetts. The products of this plant were the acids, muriatic, sulphuric, nitric, carbolic and, during the war, picric acid. The powerhouse was immediately adjacent to the sidings of the Shipping Department, where pure acids were loaded into tank cars for shipment, gushing from overhead spouts directly into the steel tanks. Fumes arising during this procedure, though quickly disseminated in the outside air, drifted into the turbine room where I worked for more than a week, with sufficient strength to corrode badly all metal parts in the place.

All exposed parts of the machinery and the switchboards were kept thoroughly greased for protection. Even my pocket knife, keyring, and the buckles of my garters I found in a day or two were attacked. My watch, I had been warned to leave behind in my hotel room.

Seeing the workmen throughout the plant nonchalantly exposing themselves to acids and fumes, I inquired as to which of the various acids was most dangerous to handle. It surprised me when the Chief Engineer of the plant named carbolic, as I was certain the others were far more powerful in their effect. But carbolic acid, it seems, is rapidly absorbed by the skin, enters the blood stream and is conveyed quickly and with fatal effect to the heart. I was told of a then recent case where a workman had slipped and thrust one leg accidentally into a tank of pure phenol, wetting it to the knee. His foreman immediately cut away the trouser leg and washed the skin thoroughly with the stream of a high pressure water hose, telling his man then to run to the dispensary, less than a hundred yards distant, to have the leg swabbed off with ammonia. The workman sprang off into the night, this having happened on a late shift.

Next morning his body was found. He had covered not more than one half the distance to the infirmary when the deadly poison had stopped his heart, probably within two or three minutes after the accident. This was a revelation to me; I have never forgotten it.—Harl Vincent, New York, N. Y.

Quiz Page

WE present the following questions, problems, and brain teasers as a pleasant means of entertaining you, as well as a means of testing your knowledge. Therefore you will find some of them fantastic, some serious, some humorous, and some just plain twisters calculated to baffle you by tricky means. If you can answer 70% of them, you can consider yourself above the average in general knowledge and intelligence and cleverness. Inasmuch as this feature is your feature, you are cordially invited to submit your own pet twisters and questions for the rest of the readers to tackle.

CHANGE PLEASE

One of those unthinking persons who drive street-car conductors crazy boarded a car and handed the conductor a ten dollar bill. Muttering beneath his breath, the conductor produced all the money he had in his pockets, totaling \$14.19. But to his amazement he found that beyond the impossibility of changing the ten dollar bill, he couldn't change a bill of any denomination, nor did he have change for a half-dollar, quarter, dime, or nickel. What bills and change did the conductor have?

QUESTION BOX

1. What is electro culture?
2. How far away can an airplane be seen by the naked eye, under favorable conditions?
3. Is there any living creature which sweats blood?
4. The Venus de Milo is considered by many authorities of feminine beauty to be the perfect feminine form, and her measurements have been used as a standard of comparison. If you are a woman, would you like to be as tall as the statue, or if you are a man, would you like your best girl to possess that height?
5. What is the difference between the circles and the belts of Saturn?

STAR DUST

1. Is the Earth traveling directly toward the star Vega, and at what speed?
2. How fast is the solar system moving?
3. If a comet ever hits the earth, will it explode?
4. How many stars can be seen with the naked eye?
5. How long is a lunar year?

TRUE AND FALSE

1. A woodpecker pecks because he is signaling to birds of the same species. True..... False.....
2. Amara-Kosha is Sultan of Hindustan. True..... False.....
3. The Palace of Engineering is one foot higher on a warm day than on a chilly night. True..... False.....
4. Italy and Japan have had 27,000 earthquakes each in the past 50 years. True..... False.....
5. Radium is extracted from uranium. True..... False.....
6. Greek fire is the phosphorescent flame seen on the

masts of ships and on toll structures. True..... False.....

7. Metallic potassium and metallic sodium will burst into flame if water is poured upon them. True..... False.....

8. The Roman toga was a large square piece of cloth, draped over the shoulders. True..... False.....

9. The custom of kissing first came into being as an expression of endearment between kinsmen and kinswomen. True..... False.....

10. Australia is known as the shadeless land. True..... False.....

11. The scarab, or beetle, was regarded in Egypt as a symbol of immortality, and was therefore placed on mummies as a sign of resurrection. True..... False.....

12. "Clabber" is an Irish term meaning a babble of voices. True..... False.....

13. "Bula Matari" was the native name of Stanley, the explorer. True..... False.....

14. Fish never sleep. True..... False.....

15. Cork is obtained from the core of the cork oak. True..... False.....

STRIKE OUT THE WORD THAT DOES NOT CONFORM

1. Star, solar system, nebulae, galaxy, universe.
2. Prevalent, isolated, rare, sporadic, occasional.
3. Zenith, culmination, minimum, pinnacle, summit.
4. Invertebrate, confirmed, chronic, inchoate, habitual.
5. Silver, gold, arsenic, xenon, platinum.

PROBLEM IN RHYME

If from my age three subtracted be—

One-sixth, one-half, and three times three,

I then, old enough to vote would be.

What is my age, can you tell me?

SCRAMBLED WORDS

1. A story based on advanced imagination. SYNTAAF
2. Something hard to figure out. OPBLRME
3. A method of cooking eggs. CODHEAP
4. Something singularly startling. ANGZMAI
5. The basis of all modern progress. NCICEES

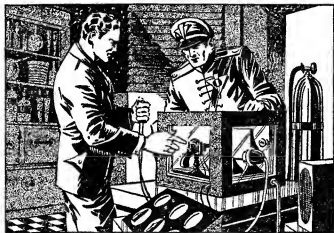
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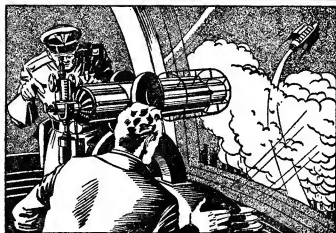
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RAY HOLMES



1 "Major Ackley," said Ray Holmes, "I called you to my laboratory to demonstrate why glimmers aren't needed on Venus. Sound waves are killed in carbon dioxide. Notice this gun cannot be heard in this carbon dioxide filled case."



2 "Observe that Venus has a high carbon dioxide content in its atmosphere. This spectrograph reveals the characteristic lines. Venus is evening star, so you'll have to look quickly . . . bother that Express! It's ruined visibility."



3 "One moment, a telecall for me. Major! That man is dying! And he's screaming something—what's wrong with this receiver? He isn't coming through. Observe, Major! We'll need to remember every detail of this."



4 "Behind that door—a man! Get that legend, *Manager . . . Atlantic Space Terminus*. The Express just took off from there! Why doesn't he enter? The door must be locked. Remember him, he'll be a very important witness!"



5 "What's that peculiar smudge on his cheek—looks like soot. He has a traveling bag. The man on the floor is nearly done for. Something virulent there! If that room is full of gas it's dangerous to enter."



6 "We've been cut off! How could that be? No one in the room to turn off the television. This is odd! Someone infinitely clever behind all this. Come on, Ackley, we've got work to do. That looks like brutal murder to me!"

SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE



7 "Heart failure, Dr. Jensen? But it *might* be possible that a gas could cause death, and look like heart failure. I know there was no trace of gas when we entered, and the door was locked. But I saw him die, and he choked!"



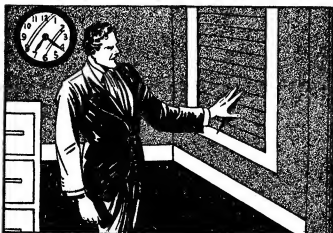
8 "This key I found on the floor. Identical with the key on the dead man. Both unlock the door. Both *inside* the room. The door has a night latch. Clue here somewhere. Ackley, bring your prisoner. I'll question him."



9 "You're Milton Berge? You came in last night on a freighter to ask Hammond, the dead man, for a job—oh, a *former partner*! Went to the Lunar penal colony for five years for theft! Came to beg for reinstatement!"



10 "Sounds logical. And you *were* locked out. But that television—somehow it went dead. It works perfectly now. Both sound and vision. But when Hammond died, he was screaming a message, and no sound came through."



11 "This ventilator. Closed tight. Supposed to remove carbon dioxide fumes from the take-off pit below. Should be open at all times! So that's where the gas came from! The Express took off at 5:30! Could a dead man close it?"



12 "Milton Berge, I arrest you for the murder of John Hammond! Even though Hammond failed in his attempt to accuse you, you have trapped yourself!" (If you haven't already solved this crime, see page 90 for solution.)

QUIZ PAGE ANSWERS

(Quiz on Page 87)

CHANGE PLEASE

The conductor had one five-dollar bill, four two-dollar bills, one half-dollar, one quarter, four dimes, and four pennies.

QUESTION BOX

1. The Department of Agriculture uses this term to refer to practices designed to increase the growth and yield of crops through electrical treatment, such as maintenance of an electrical charge on a network over the plants or an electric current through the soil in which the plants are growing.

2. An airplane can be seen with the naked eye under favorable conditions from 10,000 to 15,000 feet in the air.

3. The hippopotamus sweats blood. The skin of this animal contains a great quantity of an oily substance which exudes from the pores, and under stress of excitement, this substance flows out copiously and is tintured with blood, producing the bloody sweat for which the animal is famous.

4. Your answer should be no. The height of the famous statue is 2 metres 38 millimetres. This is a trifle over 6 feet 3 inches, quite a bit over the usual feminine height.

5. The rings of Saturn are swarms of very small satellites revolving in orbits that are nearly circular and that lie in the same plane. They are thought to be the shattered debris of a former moon. The belts are on the surface of Saturn itself, and are cloud formations, a purely atmospheric phenomena.

STAR DUST

1. Our sun is traveling toward Vega, and therefore the earth. But the earth's motion is a curved one, composed of the varied movements of the system, its rotation around the sun, etc. The speed is about 12 miles per second.

2. Our solar system is progressing at a rate of 12 miles per second toward a point in the constellation Hercules, whose approximate right ascension is 270 degrees and declination 34 degrees north.

3. The mass of a comet is never large; and the material is, for the most part, exceedingly tenuous. It is probable that the earth, if struck by a comet, would witness nothing more than a meteoric shower. The explosions, if any, would be similar to those hitherto observed in the cases of large meteorites.

4. Provided one stays at the same place, the number visible from the United States would be about 4,000.

5. 354 days, 8 hours, 48 minutes and 34 seconds.

TRUE AND FALSE

1. False. He pecks for food, or to build a nest. It is when he *drums* that he is calling for others of his species.

2. False. Amara-Kosha is a vocabulary of Sanskrit roots compiled by the Sanskrit grammarian, Amara Sinha, about 375 A. D. It contains 10,000 words arranged in metre to aid the memory.

3. True. Expansion causes this phenomenon.

4. True.

5. False. Radium is extracted from pitchblende, largely uranium oxide.

6. False. Greek fire was an incendiary composition, used by the Byzantine Greeks. It was supposed to have been made of asphalt, saltpeter, and sulphur. It would burn on and under water.

7. True.

8. False. It was a semi-circular piece of cloth.

9. False. Pliny says it was first used as a means of determining whether wives and daughters had tasted wine.

10. True. The leaves of some of the trees are so arranged as to present their edges to the sky, others have foliage composed of mere needles, and others dispense with leaves altogether.

11. True.

12. False. Clabber is milk in the process of souring, and means, literally, "thick mud."

13. True.

14. True. They sometimes remain quiet in pools or streams, but they never sleep.

15. False. It is obtained from the bark.

STRIKE OUT THE WORD THAT DOES NOT CONFORM

1. Star.

2. Prevalent.

3. Minimum.

4. Inchoate.

5. Xenon.

PROBLEM IN RHYME

My age would be 90 years.

Let X = My present age

$$X - \frac{1}{6}X - \frac{1}{2}X - 9 = 21$$

$$\frac{1}{3}X - 9 = 21$$

$$\frac{1}{3}X = 21 + 9$$

$$\frac{1}{3}X = 30$$

$$X = 90$$

SCRAMBLED WORDS

1. FANTASY

2. PROBLEM

3. POACHED

4. AMAZING

5. SCIENCE

THE SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE

(Solution)

MILTON BERGE, coming in last night on the freighter, must have remained in the building all night, because he still had his traveling bag, and his professed errand was not intended travel, but to plead for his old job. Thus, he lied. The smudge of dirt on his face also indicates he had not faced a mirror all day. Certainly a man seeking a job would be presentable. So, during the night, having concealed himself in the building, he had altered dampers in the ventilation pipes, so that fumes from the take-off of the Venus Express could ascend to the office of John Hammond. Since the odor of carbon dioxide is not noticeable, Hammond would be unaware that death was pouring into his room until it was too late.

When Hammond realized what was happening, he found himself locked in, with Berge staring vengeance in at him. Realizing he was doomed, he attempted to get revenge by turning on the television set and shouting an accusation of the murderer before he died. But since sound does not carry in an atmosphere of carbon dioxide, his voice did not register, and he died, his purpose unaccomplished.

Berge, knowing television demands bright lighting, knew all he had to do was to snap off the lights, from the switch outside the door, to conceal his movement into the room to shut off the deadly vent and the television set while holding his breath. Then, retreating, he could allow the room to clear by leaving the door open a moment. This would be rapid, due to the efficiency of the ventilation of the corridor. Then, closing the door, having set the lock and thrown his own key on the floor inside, he could remain, an apparently innocent spectator.

Only a man thoroughly familiar with the building could have planned the murder so efficiently and carried it out.

THE DEVIL FLOWER

(Continued from page 83)

now occupied, and this by Lemuel Curtis, who lay reclining on his side with his paper-white hands outside the covers.

"Glad to see you, Doc," he greeted Frank in a weak voice. "Thought you'd never get here."*

In one swift glance Frank noted that the mastoid bandages were tight and clean and that they were tied in the approved manner. But his heart sank when he observed the wanness of his former patient's countenance and the bloodlessness of his lips. It was unbelievable that the man could have failed so much in the few days he had been here.

"Got to you as soon as I could, old man," Frank said cheerily. "And how goes it? Feeling better?" He had known the young broker for a number of years, and counted him as an intimate friend.

"Pretty good for an old guy." Curtis essayed a smile but was obviously trying to signal with his eyes. And his hand crept out over the covers unostentatiously.

"Would you like to see his chart?" Gregory asked Frank amiably.

"If you don't mind."

As the older physician turned to reach for the daily record, the nervous fingers of Lem Curtis twitched into view and crammed a folded paper into Frank's fist. He covered it at once, then pocketed it. Curtis grinned knowingly.

GREGORY was extending the chart, but Frank gave it scant heed. It was only a tabulation of temperatures, respiration rates, feedings, and the usual run-of-mine hospital information.

"How about his blood tests, blood counts?" Frank inquired.

Reluctantly, Gregory brought them. Amazed, Frank saw un-

mistakable evidence of the dread pernicious anaemia. The daily increase in deficiency of red corpuscles was indeed alarming. He looked again at the chart and noted that the use of calves' liver was properly recorded. Everything seemed to be in order.

"You haven't considered blood transfusions?" he asked.

"Not as yet. As you know from your own experience, the latest practice does not encourage their use too much." Gregory smiled in his unctuous, insincere manner.

"Right. Well, I've seen enough for the present, Doctor. Shall we return to your office?"

Frank was anxious to get where he could read the note Curtis had been so anxious to get to him.

"Yes, suppose we do." The older physician was actually beaming. This had turned out to be easier than he had anticipated. "And, Doctor, you'll not be able to get away from the Pines tonight; suppose I assign a room to you and have your bags brought in. Perhaps you'd like to remain a few days here yourself?"

"I had hoped to; in fact I planned to—if you agreed, of course. I like it here."

Gregory did not know quite how to take this, but he let it pass. With his guest so affable, he could hardly do otherwise.

"See you later, Lem." Frank waved airily and followed his host from the cabin.

LATER, in the seclusion of his room, he puzzled over the shakily penciled note.

"Something mighty queer here," it read. "Nurse on duty all day but not at night. Gregory visits late and gives me medicine that's not reported on the chart. Dope, I think, because I get so drowsy I just have to pass out. Wake every

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morning weak as the devil—and mentally depressed. That whisper is still in the air. Do something, Doc, or I'm a goner. I KNOW it."

This called for thought, for watching and waiting. The note did not clarify things at all. Frank determined, though, that he'd see this through, regardless of professional ethics or of consequences. He considered several possibilities. None seemed logical. This man Ballinger might be involved; possibly not. Gregory, on the face of it, seemed to be the one to suspect. If Ballinger were in on it, in what connection could it be? Again the surgeon racked his brain for memory of that odd name. The connection still eluded him.

If Gregory were administering drugs to Curtis, why? What could it have to do with the apparent anaemic condition? Of course, there was the possibility that Curtis was so greatly concerned over his own condition that he was inclined to exaggerate ordinary happenings in his own mind. But something was very much wrong here. He would have to find out what it was.

Late that afternoon he strolled down toward the laboratory and, from a distance, saw Gregory and Ballinger stooping over one of the many hotbeds outside. They were so absorbed they did not notice his coming.

Taking advantage of their preoccupation, he circled the building cautiously and secreted himself behind a clump of bushes within sight and earshot. Immediately the plant those two were examining took his entire attention. It was like no growth Frank had ever seen, having a mass of rubbery, vine-like branches that seemed always to be in motion. Weirdly so, as if actuated by some external force. Yet there was no sign of a breeze that might have blown them about.

At the tips, the rubbery members were milky-white in hue and nearly transparent, but near the heavy main stem they shaded off into a deep pink hue. As the doctor watched, the rosieness near the stem of the unnatural plant began to rise and fall, much as if it were a liquid boiling in a test tube. A sickly-sweet odor assailed his nostrils and his instant impression was that it came from the growth. Ballinger was lifting the pot that held the vegetable incongruity and was removing it from the hotbed.

"Careful, Rufe," Gregory cautioned.

His face was turned toward the hiding-place and Frank saw with a start that the older physician's eyes were fixed—staring—as if he were in a trance.

"Lemme be!" snarled the uncouth Ballinger. "I know what I'm doin'. This here's the last time *this* one comes outa here, too."

IT was quite incomprehensible. Frank drew himself into the smallest space possible as the other two made for the laboratory, Ballinger carrying the potted monstrosity. The door closed behind them. Frank moved stealthily to one of the windows, hoping to peer inside. But he found it curtained so heavily that nothing could be seen. Disappointed, he returned to the porch of the main building.

Dusk came quickly and with it came the return of Martin Gregory, who dropped heavily into a deck chair beside Frank. His eyes looked better now but there was still a deliberation in his movements that bespoke some sense-deadening influence. The man must be a narcotic addict. A strange place, Gregory Pines. Robeson's nerves chilled.

"Find your room satisfactory?" Gregory drawled.

"First rate. Couldn't be better. All the same I can't seem to get Curtis out of my mind."

What is your honest opinion of the case, Doctor?"

The older man's eyes narrowed. No sign of drowsiness or of a lethargic disinterest was in them now. "It's just as I told you; you saw for yourself, didn't you? And you can examine Curtis again in any way and as often as you like. Perhaps you can help me in the case."

This last was said with a knowing smirk.

Frank shifted his attack. "Fond of your botanical research, aren't you, Doctor?"

The change in the man was startling. He purpled; cleared his throat noisily. "You been spying on me?" he demanded.

Frank raised his left eyebrow quizzically. "Would that worry you?" he countered.

"Now you look here!" Gregory sprang from his seat and his pudgy fingers clasped and unclasped in the sheer fury that was within him. "I've been more than courteous, allowing you the run of my place and I've seen fit to put you up for awhile and let you see this patient of yours as often as you please. But I warn you; keep your meddling nose out of my affairs or you'll find yourself in a peck of trouble."

With this outburst he stalked off, slamming the screen door after him.

AFTER supper, Dr. Roberson wandered through the grounds aimlessly, still without seeing Gregory or Ballinger. Finally he decided to return to his own room and await developments, or at least to plan a course of action. He had not realized how physically tired the day had made him and dozed off in an easy-chair while merely contemplating the events which had led up to the situation.

Awakening with a start, he looked at his watch and saw that it was well past the midnight hour. Something told him

he should not retire at once; he paced the floor for the better part of a half-hour, then decided to get out in the open. Perhaps it was only a hunch, but he felt that he might learn something of value by another round of the premises.

All was quiet. There was no moon, but enough of the light of the stars was there to enable him to make his way down the path which led past the laboratory to the cottage where Curtis was housed. He was disappointed—no lights in the cabin. About to return to his room, he was stopped in his tracks by the unmistakable sound from within that marks a deeply drugged man—a heavy snoring. Lem Curtis! Frank stepped to the door of the cabin, found it open and walked in. It was a surprise to find that his patient—and friend—was in a stupor, from which nothing could arouse him at the moment. The nurse was off duty, of course, and on the spur of the moment Frank ransacked her cabinet, obtained the necessary materials and with the aid of a hand flash withdrew a generous sample of Curtis' blood. He observed a fresh puncture almost at the point where he himself needed.

The man did not stir or even groan at the sharp stab; his face was a ghastly mask in the light of the flash. But Frank was all professional now; his personal feelings were put aside. He snapped off the flash and tip-toed from the building, sprinting down the path toward the laboratory. The grounds, seemingly, were deserted, the main building dark excepting for the dim lights of the corridors.

FRANK was no second-story worker, nor had he the slightest knowledge of or sympathy with the back-porch-casement-opening burglar. But he learned somehow the way to get into Ballinger's laboratory. With the blood sample carefully

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protected in its tube, he cautiously felt his way to the bench of the microscopes and with only a single palm-shielded flash from the electric hand lamp found the switch of the illuminator of one of the excellent instruments. This gave him plenty of light without any betraying glare. Quickly he found a slide, stain and cover glass, and prepared his specimen.

He searched the brilliant field of vision carefully. The smear was a perfect one. The deficiency of red corpuscles was so evident as to require no count. But no microcytes, those minute elementary granules associated with anaemia, were present. Curtis was not an anaemic. His blood was being drained artificially from his weakening body. That other puncture meant that Gregory had robbed him of his life fluid, not infused it.

It came to Frank instantly, this horrible thing, and thoughts of Rufe's squirming and rustling plant rushed in to show the solution.

Rufus Ballinger was killing men to satisfy his insane lust for experimentation with plant life, there could be no doubt of that. He was endeavoring to produce flora that was half fauna—probably all fauna in his crazy mind. Worse than this . . .

A whispering sound close at hand startled Frank into something like normalcy. He turned his head in the direction from which the eerie noise had come and saw slimy pink tentacles reaching over the window-sill from outside. One of the plants had gone berserk! The thing was alive and it was gigantic! Flowers, blood-red in hue, with faces like crimson gargoyles, budded and bloomed in a second of time, looked at him with sinister gloating . . . advanced with the speed of a pack of stalking wolves.

Breath-takingly, a pungent

odor assailed his nostrils. The lights of the laboratory flashed on blindingly. Abruptly he knew no more.

WHEN consciousness returned, slowly and painfully, Frank found himself flat on his back in dewy grass. Dawn was just breaking, as evidenced by the paleness of the eastern horizon. There were sounds of men talking in low monotone and he strained his barely aroused senses to recall what this was all about and his ears to learn the meaning of the muttered intensities of speech. Suddenly, as if he had snapped out from under an anaesthetic, he remembered.

He sat up, stiffly—they had not tied him. He had been drugged; the odor of nitrous oxide was strong in his nostrils. What they had used to supplement that first whiff he did not know, nor how they had managed to accomplish it. In the semi-darkness he saw Gregory and Ballinger working over one of the hotbeds of the strange plant growth.

"If I was you," Rufe was saying, "I'd put him out the way. Dead men don't talk, Martin, and he'd be easier'n the others."

"Come, come," Gregory responded slowly and with apparent difficulty in his speech. "There are more important things right at this time. Watch what you are doing."

Ballinger squealed shrilly—like a rat, Frank thought. "The damn thing nearly tore my hand off me," he whined. "Why'd we take that extra pint from Curtis?"

Still in somewhat of a daze, Frank reflected that there are about thirteen pints of blood in the average human body. That even a professional blood donor can hardly give up more than about a quart every two weeks and still remain robust. But this!—these devils must have been taking a pint a day from

the young broker—an extra pint tonight! No wonder the external symptoms of anaemia were manifest in Curtis! No wonder those other lives had been cut short.

Frank, his head clearing by now, rolled over on his side and saw that forms were taking shape more distinctly in the brightening dawn. He saw that the two men were working over one of the wriggly plants, that it was more gigantic than any he had before seen and infinitely more active. Its tendrils whipped about like the arms of an octopus, and Gregory was quite terrified at the swift movements of the horrid appendages, ducking and cowering like a frightened schoolboy.

"Get yourself together, Doc," snarled Ballinger, and he struck the older man's cheek with the flat of his hand.

An incomprehensible thing happened then. The plant, like a faithful hound protecting its master, struck out at the uncouth botanist.

The unfortunate man screeched and fought horribly. He was helpless in the clutches of the thing he had created.

Frank forced himself from his horrified helplessness.

"Gregory!" he yelled leaping forward. "Watch out! The damned thing will get you when it's finished with Ballinger."

THE botanist suddenly ceased struggling. The plant, dripping red now, was writhing its members about Martin Gregory's face and neck. Gregory screamed like a trapped and horribly injured animal.

Tingling with artificial paralysis as his hands were, Frank felt in his pockets. Of course he always carried his hypodermic kit with him. It was there.

Gregory now was only half conscious. Frank loaded his hypodermic with phenol—full to the neck. He crawled toward the dying man. The wriggling plant

had him almost completely wrapped up in its tentacles.

He plunged the needle into the heavy root-stem of the thing. Its charge shot home. A wildly thrashing tentacle knocked him down. It coiled about his neck, and stinging pain shot through him. He fought desperately to escape.

Gregory screamed again, obviously helpless again the octopus-like thing which was engulfing him. Despair gripped Robeson. The poison wasn't working. He choked as the tentacles tightened convulsively.

THEN those blood-dripping flowers shriveled their faces. The arms relaxed. With a gasp of relief, Frank tore away the dripping things with suckers that stuck graspingly and drew away his life-blood.

Ballinger was dead—his body a waxy hunk.

Lemuel Curtis now would be no more molested. Gregory, Frank realized, had been innocent. And Gregory would live.

Gregory, hypnotized by the mad botanist—who would never again kill human beings—had been only a tool.

Curtis's life was safe now; he would recover with proper treatment. Building him up with the proper vitamins would take care of that.

Frank climbed erect and tottered to the small cabin to assure the young broker of his ultimate safety. And then, reviving his own faculties, he hobbled back to the scene of the plant's extinction.

By now Gregory's mind was almost normal. Frank helped him to his room . . . they helped each other.

"It was a bad dream," was all Gregory said. Frank nodded. Better let it end that way.

Ingalls and Galloway were gone beyond recall. Curtis was safe. Ballinger was dead—and in the morning they'd kill the young plants. Yes—it *had* been a bad dream.

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Martin Bronstein,
Box 105,
Kerhonkson, N. Y.

● The editors feel that they've struck a marvelous balance in science fiction with the stories of this issue of *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*. We've always held that any type fiction should be entertaining first, and technical last. We have endeavored to present science fiction that will entertain you, that will be interesting, as well as educational, because the education is unconsciously assimilated while the story is thoroughly enjoyed. Our system of footnotes has proven itself of great value in this respect.—Ed.

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● You will find *FANTASTIC HOAXES* a fact article, and our back cover, plus the interior article concerning it is based on astronomical facts. The Martian is hypothetical, true, but he is constructed as he might be, considering what we know of Mars. And we'll continue to present fact articles, such as *FANTASTIC INVENTIONS*, too, which is on the subject of perpetual motion machines this time.—Ed.

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Edward Gadouas,
2618 W. Michigan St.
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● We have given it everything!—Ed.

The MAN FROM MARS

By PAUL

Science tells us that it is logical to believe that other planets are inhabited by some form of life. Just what type isn't exactly certain, but astronomy points toward definite planetary conditions which can be taken into consideration in imagining what type of "man" that planet would be most likely to develop. On our back cover we have conceived of the Man From Mars, as he most logically might exist.

Mars is the oldest of planets, having cooled faster than its larger brothers. Its location also aided in its rapid advance, and life must have appeared there long before on earth. Therefore, our Martian must be more advanced, more evolved than we, and taking into consideration his planetary environment he would most likely possess the following features.

Mars' lesser gravity would give him great stature, would

provide the necessity for rather peculiar modes of locomotion. Therefore, we can give him suction feet, rather frail, thin body, and large head. Thin atmosphere would make large ears necessary to catch sound, would give him enormous lung development, and would tend to make him develop telepathy as a more practical method of communication. A very cold climate would clothe him with heavy warm fur, white in color due to the absence of color-producing sunlight. His advanced science would aid him by providing extremely efficient protective clothing as a most necessary factor in his life. He would also possess an evolution permitting protection of delicate eyes and nose against cold through retraction into the body. All in all he would be a highly evolved creature, possessing great science knowledge and high intelligence.

KEY TO BACK COVER ILLUSTRATION

A Erectable natural telepathic antenna for extra sensory communication.

B Enormous shell shaped ears to catch sound waves in Mars' rarefied atmosphere.

C Retractable eyes and nose to protect against freezing in extreme cold.

D Huge lung development, to provide sufficient oxygen for a large body.

E Heavy, closely knit white fur, to protect the frail body against extreme cold.

F Atomic weapon, utilizing advanced atomic science of the power in the atom.

G Synthetic water and food pellets to provide nourishment on the desert.

H Scientifically constructed clothing, impervious to cold, electrically warmed.

I Disc shaped feet, equipped with natural suction cups and valve openings.

J Protective glassite helmet, since Mars' air is too thin for Earthmen.

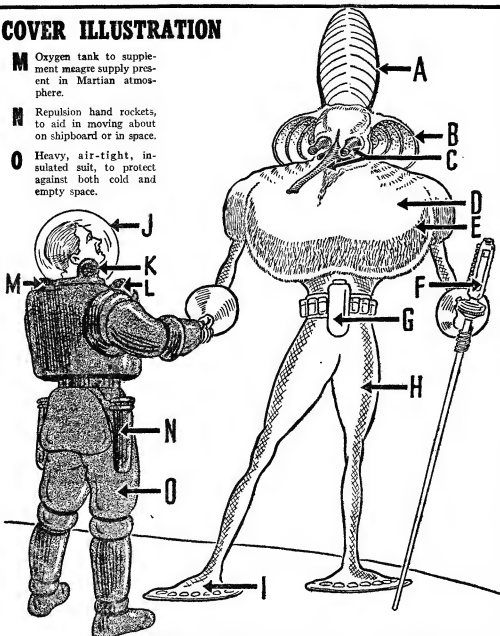
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